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ABSTRACT

This report presents summaries of five case studies from the Indicators Project on Education Organizing, which was designed to examine the role of community organizing in school reform. For over 2 years, this action research project documented the education organizing of five urban groups. The research developed an Education Organizing Indicators Framework that documented observable outcomes in schools and student learning. The framework focused on eight indicator areas (leadership development, community power, social capital, public accountability, equity, school-community connection, positive school climate, and high quality curriculum and instruction). The five case study organizations in this report are: The Alliance Organizing Project, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Chicago Illinois; New York ACORN, New York, New York; and Oakland Community Organizations, Oakland, California. Two appendices present definitions of indicator areas and the Indicators Project advisory group. (SM)

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Appendix: Case Studies

Strong Neighborhoods Strong Schools

The Indicators Project on Education Organizing

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Appendix: Case Studies

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Strong Neighborhoods Strong Schools

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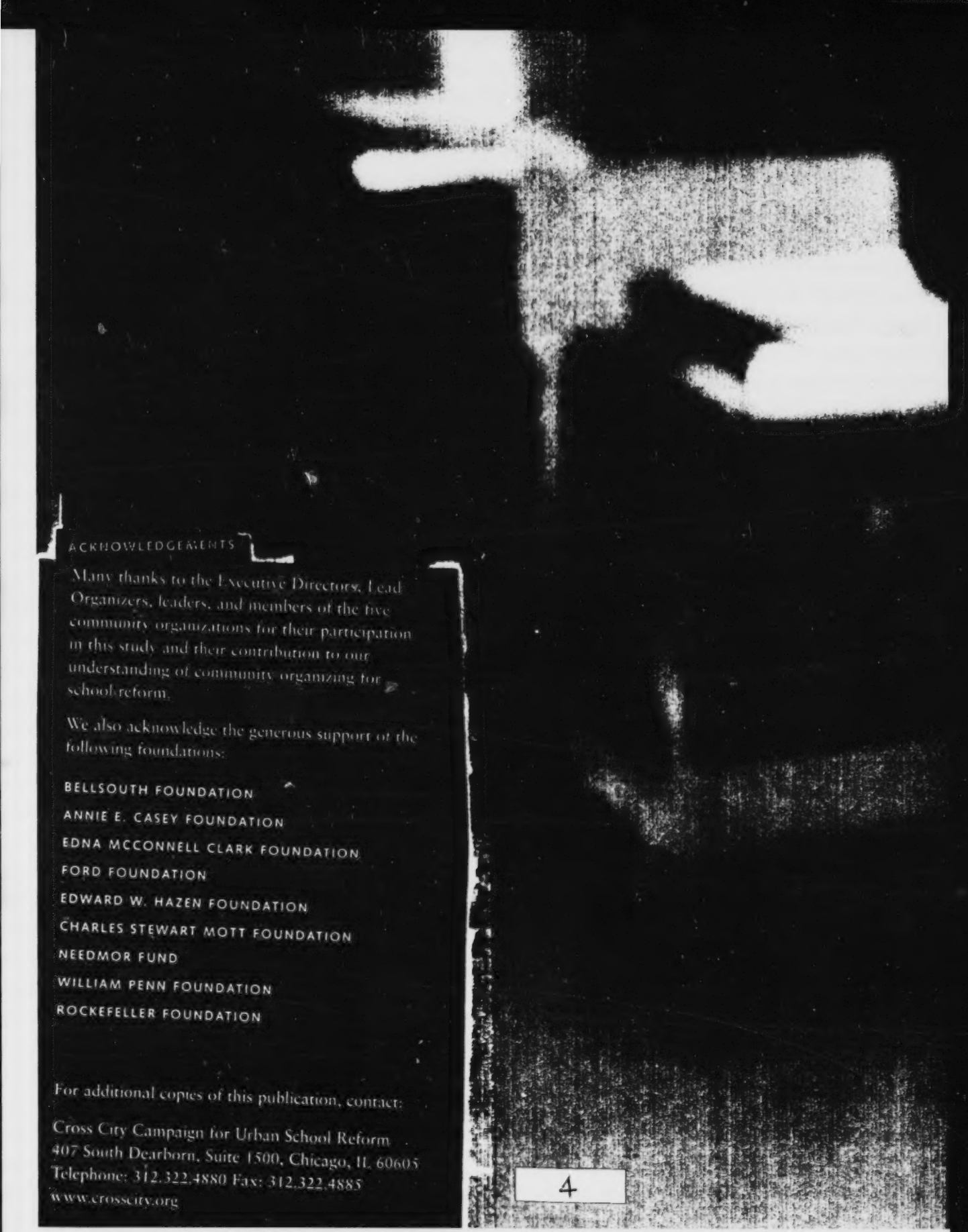

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The Indicators Project on Education Organizing

The Alliance Organizing Project, Austin Interfaith, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, New York ACORN, and Oakland Community Organizations are the five case studies in *The Indicators Project*, an action-research project to document the contribution that community organizing makes to school reform, disseminate the findings, and forward the work these groups are doing. The project grows out of the work of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform's Schools and Community program. The Cross City Campaign believes that while there is widespread agreement among educators and the public on the importance of "parent involvement" and "parents as first teachers," there is far less understanding of the role that strong, well-informed, powerful organizations of parent and community leaders can play in school reform. The Cross City Campaign invited Research for Action, a non-profit educational research organization with a history of studying community-school relations, to be its partner in examining the contribution such organizations can make in bringing about quality educational experiences and equity for urban students and in strengthening low-income urban neighborhoods.

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See report: *Successful Community Organizing for School Reform* for a full discussion of the Education Organizing Indicators Framework and how accomplishments in the indicator areas work together to bring about change in schools and communities.

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The aim of the research was to develop an Education Organizing Indicators Framework that documents observable outcomes in schools and student learning. We developed the Framework by looking at the activities of organizing groups across multiple sites and categorizing their work within eight key indicator areas. The eight indicator areas are: leadership development, community power, social capital, public accountability, equity, school/community connections, positive school climate, and high quality instruction and curriculum. (See Appendix A for definitions of the indicator areas). We also developed a Theory of Change that shows how work in each of the indicator areas contributes to building community capacity and improving schools—ultimately increasing student learning. (See page 7 for a model of the Theory of Change.)

A major purpose of the project's case studies is to show the accomplishments of community organizing for school reform by using the Education Organizing Indicators Framework. We illustrate the utility of the Framework for documenting the contribution of community organizing groups to school reform by looking at selected organizing "stories" in some depth. In each report, we use four of the indicator areas to interpret the organizing stories, showing evidence that the group is making a difference. The report also shows the complexity and challenge of community organizing for school reform. It illustrates the range of strategies that groups use, how local context affects organizing and outcomes, as well as how organizing spurs and shapes local education reform.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING GROUPS

Community organizing groups working for school reform share the following characteristics:

- They work to change public schools to make them more equitable and effective for all students.
- They build a large base of members who take collective action to further their agenda.
- They build relationships and collective responsibility by identifying shared concerns among neighborhood residents and creating alliances and coalitions that cross neighborhood and institutional boundaries.
- They develop leadership among community residents to carry out agendas that the membership determines through a democratic governance structure.
- They use the strategies of adult education, civic participation, public action, and negotiation to build power for residents of low- to moderate-income communities that results in action to address their concerns.

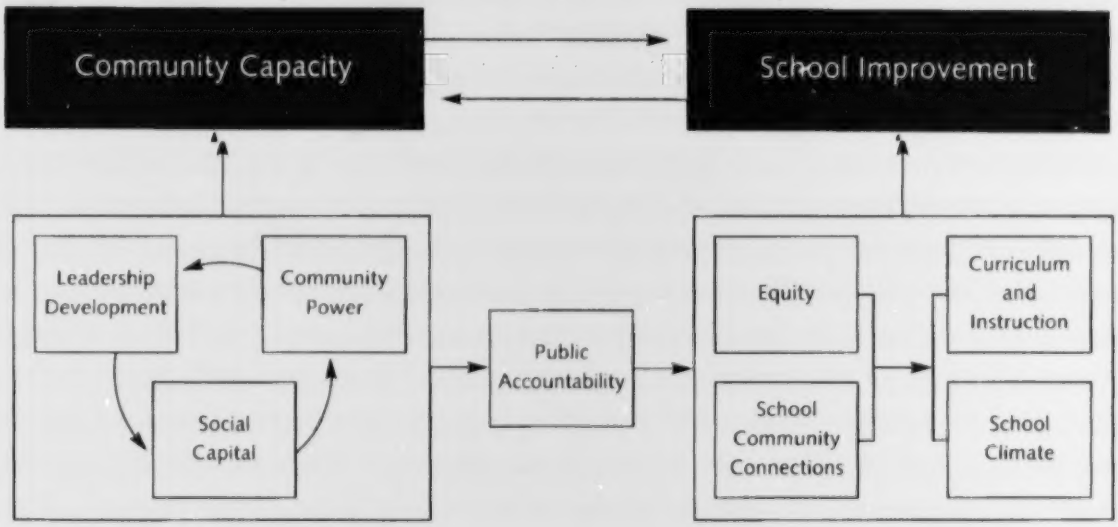
RESEARCH APPROACH

In order to develop an indicators framework the research design included four levels of investigation:

- Research for Action (RFA) and the Cross City Campaign (CCC) conducted a broad search and created a database of 140 community organizing groups working on school reform nationwide.
- RFA and CCC collaborated to select 19 groups for lengthy telephone interviews. Analysis of those interviews yielded a preliminary indicators framework.
- RFA and CCC, with the help of a national advisory group (see appendix B) selected five groups for case studies.
- RFA research teams and CCC staff conducted two site-visits of three days each in spring and fall of 2000 to each of the five sites. Interviews were conducted with a wide array of public school stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators, elected officials, and education reform groups. The researchers also observed community and school events relevant to local organizing.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT IS TO SHOW THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING.

Theory of Change: Relationship of Community Capacity Building and School Improvement



The theory of change model shows the pathway of influence between building community capacity and school improvement. Work in three indicator areas—leadership development, community power, and social capital—increases civic participation and leverages power through partnerships and relationships within and across communities, as well as with school district, civic, and elected officials. Public accountability is the hinge that connects community capacity with school improvement. Increased community participation and strong relationships together broaden accountability for improving public education for children of low- to moderate-income families. Public accountability creates the political will to forward equity and school/community connection, thereby improving school climate, curriculum, and instruction making them more responsive to communities, laying the basis for improved student learning and achievement. Stronger schools, in turn, contribute to strengthening community capacity.

Case Study: AOP

ALLIANCE ORGANIZING PROJECT

Prepared by

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Eva Gold and Marcine Pickron-Davis

with

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Chris Brown

Introduction to the Alliance Organizing Project

The goal of the Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) is to organize parents and families of Philadelphia's public school students to become "full partners" in Philadelphia school reform. By full partners, AOP means that: the perspectives of parents and community members are valued; parents participate in decision-making at the local school and district levels; and parents and teachers work together to support children's learning both at school and at home. Because parents are also community members and connected to local community and religious groups, AOP also works to engage community leaders with school reform.

At the school level, AOP strengthens relationships among concerned parents and brings them together to form school-based Parent Leadership Teams. These teams of six to twelve parents first identify the issues that concern parents and that parents believe are important to the school success of their children. They then work to build relationships with the school's principal and teachers to address those concerns. Through these relationships, the teams aim to build parent/professional partnerships to improve children's school experiences and also ensure that parents are involved in making decisions on issues such as use of resources, educational priorities, and safety.

AOP also organizes at the citywide level. Representatives of Parent Leadership Teams attend citywide meetings where they exchange stories of their organizing experiences and identify concerns that are shared across their different local contexts. The group then develops citywide campaigns that seek to address their cross-school concerns through changes in district, city and state policy.

Only six years old, AOP is a relatively young organization. Nonetheless, it has already succeeded in establishing itself as a force in the Philadelphia school reform movement. To understand the work of building parent leadership and creating successful educator/community partnerships, we look at the work of AOP at school sites and at the citywide level, showing the interrelationship between local and policy-level efforts. AOP is active in all the eight indicator areas identified in this study.[1] In this report, we relate AOP's accomplishments in detail in four of the areas.[2] The four areas are:

- LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- SCHOOL/COMMUNITY CONNECTION
- SOCIAL CAPITAL
- EQUITY

NOTES

1. For a chart representing AOP's work in all the eight indicator areas, see Appendix C. This chart is not comprehensive, but does illustrate the kinds of strategies AOP has used in each area and examples of its accomplishments.

2. The data supporting the accomplishments of AOP were gathered during site visits in spring and fall 2000. The report is not comprehensive of all AOP has accomplished, but is intended to illustrate what documentation and measurement of its accomplishments might look like.

Alliance Organizing Project

The Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) is a single-issue organizing group focused on making parents and families full partners in school reform. AOP was the idea of a number of advocacy groups concerned with the lack of parent and community participation in school reform and was initiated in 1995 as part of Philadelphia's *Children Achieving* reform plan. During *Children Achieving* AOP organizers worked in 30 of the District's 260 schools as well as citywide.

Over the course of the past six years, the number of AOP organizers has fluctuated depending on its funding. As of spring 2001, AOP had a racially and ethnically diverse staff, which included an executive director, assistant director, one full-time organizer, and two part-time organizers. The executive and assistant directors form a team with one white and one African-American member. The group of organizers included a white, an African-American and a Latina. The entire staff was female. The full and part-time organizers were parents or grandparents of children in the public schools. They have come up through the AOP ranks, first as members of school-based Parent Leadership Teams and representatives and/or leaders of the AOP citywide, then as intern organizers, and now as professional organizers. The development of parents into organizers reflects AOP's commitment to being a parent-led organization.

In spring 2001, the organizers were working in seven schools, five elementary and two middle schools. The work in the middle schools is the most recent, and the intent is to continue to organize up through the feeder high schools. At each of the schools, the organizer works intensely with a Parent Leadership Team of 6-12 volunteer parents. AOP also works citywide on issues related to teacher vacancies and teacher quality, with a focus on the schools in the lowest income neighborhoods.

Even though AOP was part of *Children Achieving*, Philadelphia's systemic reform program from 1995-2000, an independent board has always governed it. The board originally consisted of two co-chairs and other members representing the advocacy groups that helped to create AOP. Today the board is primarily made up of parents and community members from the schools and neighborhoods where AOP is active, with the two co-chairs remaining to provide continuity.

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The Evolution of AOP in the Context of Systemic Reform

"[The Alliance Organizing Project is] a membership-based organization of parents and others in Philadelphia organizing to build power and improve schools so that all children can achieve. AOP reaches these goals through building relationships among all stakeholders, developing leaders, building parent groups, and waging issue campaigns on a local school and citywide level." FROM AOP MISSION STATEMENT, 1/23/01

ORIGINS OF AOP

In 1993, Philadelphia Special Commonwealth Court Judge Doris Smith issued a court ruling, stating that public school children in Philadelphia were not achieving at acceptable levels. For many parents in Philadelphia, this was not news. For parents in urban schools across the country, under-achievement of children in public schools had become the norm. At about the time of Judge Smith's ruling, education advocates and other stakeholders in Philadelphia's public school system began a series of discussions. Representatives from the Education Law Center, Parents Union for Public Schools, and Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth sat together, along with Asian-Americans United and other special interest groups. Those discussions led to a consensus: Philadelphia's public school system must change, and parents, whose children attend public schools, are best suited to usher in such change. Advocates began examining strategies for empowering parents and equipping them with the training and resources they would need. Those conversations went on for about a year.

During those discussions, the Philadelphia Public School Board selected David Hornbeck as the city's new schools superintendent. Hornbeck came to Philadelphia with a plan for sweeping change in the way education was conducted. His *Children Achieving* agenda spoke of the need to empower parents and to engage stakeholders in urban communities to become part of the school reform process. For Hornbeck, this meant developing strategies for empowering parents and equipping them with the training and resources they would need to create positive change at their local schools. He began conversations with the advocates and a joint vision was reached. Thus in 1995, the Alliance Organizing Project was born. (From Protest to Power: The Evolution of AOP, 1998, p.2)

For its first five years, AOP was a part of systemic reform in Philadelphia. Public engagement, with a special emphasis on the involvement of parents and families, was one of ten components of *Children Achieving*, Philadelphia's reform plan. In 1995, *Children Achieving* received a $50 million one-to-two matching grant over five years from the Annenberg Foundation. From 1995-2000, AOP was supported through these funds. The original plan envisioned funding organizers in all the district's 22 clusters (geographic units under *Children Achieving* that included a neighborhood high school and its middle and elementary feeder schools).

As a part of *Children Achieving*, AOP received substantial funding and its mission was part of official rhetoric, which stated that, "fundamental change [in the education of children] will not occur without a transformation in the relationship between every school and the communities which surround it." (*Children Achieving Action Design*, VIII-1). The inclusion of a community organizing initiative that was to work to bring parents and community to the school reform table in a district reform effort was unique. Many hoped that AOP's inclusion in *Children Achieving* would herald wider recognition of the need for and value of organized parents and community as partners in school reform. However, the close tie to *Children Achieving* was not all positive for AOP. The *Children Achieving* program was first implemented in six of the 22 district clusters, and to parallel the roll-out of reform, AOP also started up in those clusters. However, these were not necessarily the neighborhoods where parents were most interested in having a group such as AOP. AOP's first efforts were hobbled by the fact that the organizing did not develop organically out of neighborhood need and desire, but was imposed as part of a centrally-directed reform. Some of these initial efforts eventually died.

There were also a number of local forces, involving principals, teachers, and other parent groups, that limited AOP's growth and impact at the school level. Many principals and teachers were only vaguely aware of the components of *Children Achieving*, and some, aware or not of the vision of *Children Achieving*, were skeptical of yet another round of reform. As a result, in many instances the work of AOP, instead of being welcomed into a school, was opposed as part of a more general response to *Children Achieving*. Furthermore, rumors often preceded AOP, making its entry into a school even more problematic.

CHILDREN ACHIEVING: SYSTEMIC REFORM

In 1995 Superintendent Hornbeck launched *Children Achieving*, a ten point reform agenda based on the assumption that previous attempts at school reform have largely failed because they were too incremental, too piecemeal, too narrowly framed, and did not attempt to alter the "system" itself. In contrast, *Children Achieving* intended to offer a coherent and comprehensive reform design. As a systemic reform effort, it sought to raise student achievement and improve teaching and learning by establishing standards for student performance, implementing a strong accountability system, empowering schools by moving authority for instructional decisions away from the central office, and increasing capacity by providing strong supports for teachers and students. Content standards outlined the knowledge and skills that Philadelphia students should acquire. The accountability system assessed schools' performance annually and rewarded progress or sanctioned decline every two years. Decentralization offered new organizational structures—clusters, local school councils, and small learning communities—that aimed to move instructional decision-making closer to local neighborhoods, schools and classrooms.

Children Achieving offered a powerful set of ideas to guide educational improvement in the city. These included:

- *Primacy of results:* Results are what matter; how they are achieved is less important.
- *Equity:* The school district must be an advocate for the low-income children it serves. Equity—of academic expectations, learning opportunities and achievement outcomes—is a paramount objective.
- *School autonomy:* Those working closest to students know what's best for them, and want and need the freedom and authority to act on their decisions.
- *Strong incentives:* To spur action at the cluster and school level, strong incentives must be developed.
- *Do it all at once:* Reform in all aspects of the system must occur simultaneously and immediately to achieve significant results.

Many principals anticipated that organizing would be confrontational and disruptive, and maybe even hostile to themselves and teachers. Some associated AOP with previous community control efforts that they believed sought to disempower education professionals. These principals put pressure on the principal's association, the Commonwealth Association of School Administrators, to protect the right of principals to invite in or reject organizing at their school. Although some central office and cluster-level administrators encouraged principals to allow AOP to organize at their schools, in the end, the extent of AOP's reach was greatly affected by the receptivity of principals. In a few instances, such as the McKinley School (K-5 with 450 students), a group of AOP parent leaders persisted despite several years of an unwelcoming principal, followed by the rapid turnover of two other principals. The McKinley Parent Leadership Team had many setbacks, but persisted because of their belief that parent involvement was essential to provide the strongest educational program possible for the neighborhood's children. AOP's citywide focus and successes in other schools in the same neighborhood helped the McKinley parents sustain their efforts even when they were not welcome in the school.

AOP's impact was also diminished by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' (PFT) opposition to reforms which would substantially increase parents' role in decision-making. One part of *Children Achieving* 's decentralization plan was the establishment of Local School Councils with equal representation of parents and teachers. These councils were originally intended to have jurisdiction over all major decisions, including budget allocation, use of external resources, safety and security measures, transportation, and facilities management, as well as the selection and evaluation of principals. However, the PFT vigorously opposed full implementation of the Local School Councils. A confrontation between the union and the district over this issue resulted in changes in the composition and scope of the councils; it was agreed that the councils would have more teachers than parents, and would be advisory bodies focused on discipline and school safety. Arguably, this was a critical turning point away from the district's original commitment to empowering parents and communities. The superintendent and other architects of the Philadelphia reform had underestimated what it would take to make schools and the school system ready to accept parents as full reform partners.

Adding to the dissension, a number of traditional parent advocacy groups, such as the Home and School Association, contested the need for a new

group, feeling its creation negated their volunteer work with parents. Other groups resented the preference shown to AOP as the recipient of *Children Achieving* monies. As a result of the controversy surrounding its genesis within the district's systemic reform program, the legitimacy of AOP was questioned from the start.

Given such an adverse climate, it is a major accomplishment for AOP to have survived beyond *Children Achieving* and the departure of Superintendent Hornbeck. District, city and neighborhood decision-makers, including the president of the Board of Education[3], City Council representatives, school district and community leaders, attend AOP public events indicating that AOP is now recognized as a player in school reform. A full year after *Children Achieving*, AOP partnerships and funding are on solid ground, and it continues to play a visible role organizing and representing parents in schools and citywide.

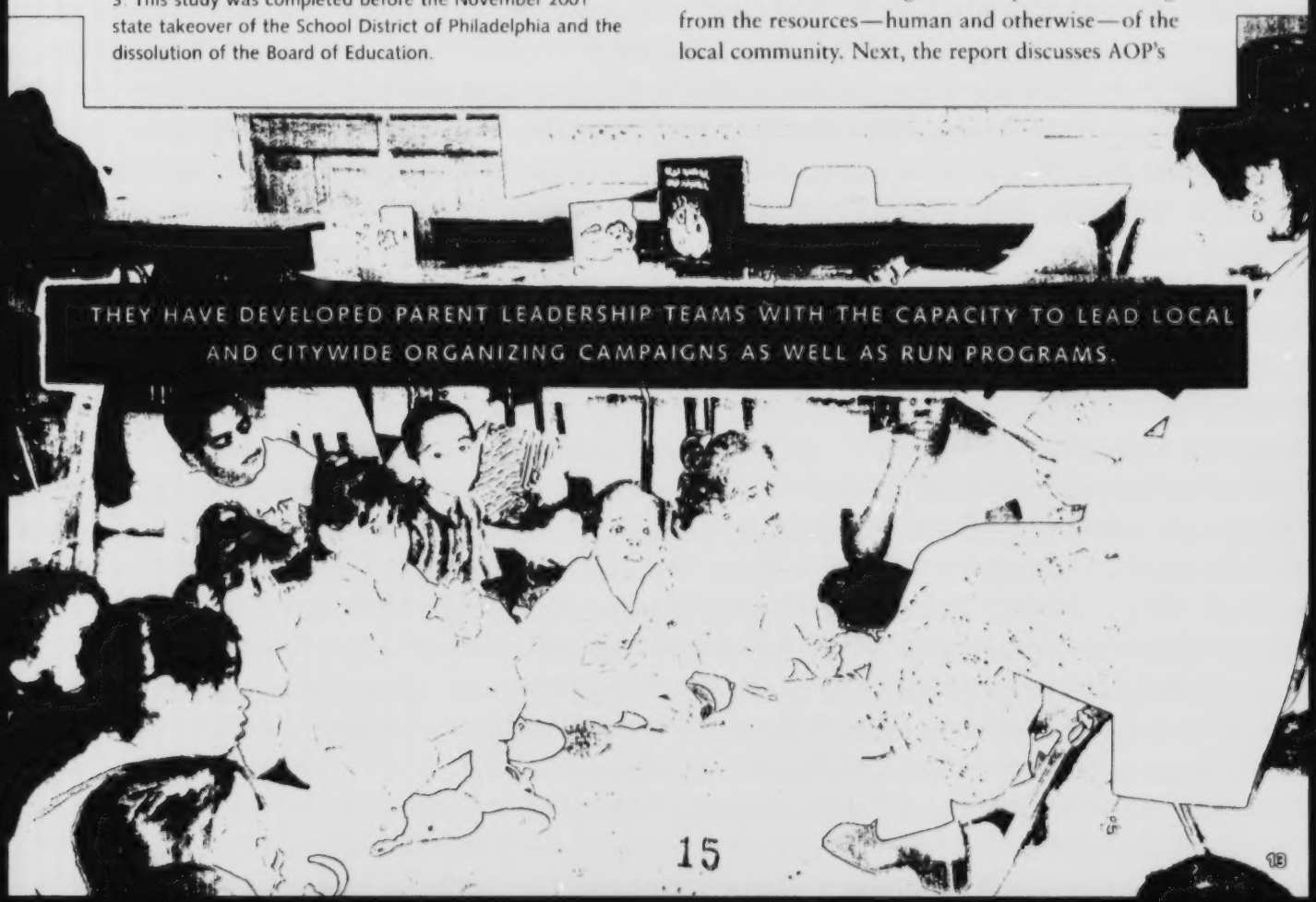
NOTES

3. This study was completed before the November 2001 state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia and the dissolution of the Board of Education.

Indicators and Measures

AOP is active in every indicator area. This report, however, discusses AOP's activity in four of the eight indicator areas: leadership development, school/community connection, social capital, and equity. We selected these four because they emerged as particularly strong areas of AOP's accomplishment in both the interviews we conducted and the events we observed during site visits, and because they are useful for portraying the start up of an organizing effort. Our data collection also draws on archival documentation, including reports and newspaper clippings.

The report begins with AOP's accomplishments in the area of leadership development. For a new organizing initiative, building a base of members is a primary task. AOP has developed a group of parent leaders who now lead the organization as staff and board members. They have also developed seven school-based Parent Leadership Teams with the capacity to lead local and citywide organizing campaigns as well as run programs. Within the second indicator area, school/community connection, the report documents AOP's success in making schools open to benefiting from the resources—human and otherwise—of the local community. Next, the report discusses AOP's



THEY HAVE DEVELOPED PARENT LEADERSHIP TEAMS WITH THE CAPACITY TO LEAD LOCAL AND CITYWIDE ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS AS WELL AS RUN PROGRAMS.

accomplishments in building social capital. The AOP organizing model is a relational one that centers on building social capital—relationships of trust and reciprocity. AOP Parent Leadership Teams have reached out into local communities to build networks of support for schools. They have also built partnerships with teachers, creating more mutual relations across traditional power imbalances. Creating new power dynamics in schools is fundamental to AOP's stated goal of changing the culture of schools so that they welcome parents' ideas and contributions. AOP has also had success in building relationships with people in the district, city government, teachers' union, and advocacy groups, which enables AOP to play a role in influencing policy decisions. The fourth indicator area that we explore in this report is equity. AOP has worked successfully to bring new financial and human resources into schools to enhance both school climate and children's academic achievement.

First Indicator Area: Leadership Development

"I realized I had other talents that I had never tapped on because I was always a mother and wife....I started out as a parent, became a parent leader, a citywide co-chair, a board member, intern, and now a full- fledged organizer. And I think this is my calling.... I've been saying [it's as if] *I've been in college because I was not a speaker* [before working with AOP]....*My first big speech was the May 17th Effective Schools Campaign public action, when people came from Chicago and New York to speak on what's working in their schools....Now I have the tools to tell Mr. Hornbeck, "Mr. Hornbeck, excuse me. I don't think that's right." Or whoever's there. Even the principal. We feel equality with them. We don't feel...well, I don't feel scared anymore."*

PARENT LEADER, NOW AN ORGANIZER

AOP organizing is guided by the belief that organizational growth and community power cannot be separated from the individual growth of its members. Reflecting this philosophy, an AOP executive director stated, *"Our greatest resource is organized people and helping people figure out how to engage in public life. And we are, in many ways, kind of like a school of public life, if you will."* AOP organizers coach parents in the skills they need to identify problems, research potential solutions, and take collective action to bring their issues to public officials. They also guide parents in reflection, evaluation, and strategic decision-making.

The basic unit of AOP organizing is the Parent Leadership Team at an individual school. Representatives from these teams form the AOP citywide group. When parents become leaders on school teams and active through citywide AOP campaigns, their sense of efficacy increases and they begin to think of themselves as agents of school change.

It is almost always true that parents first get involved with AOP because of concerns about their own children's educational experience. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a leader is the shift from a focus on her/his own child to thinking about improving education for all the children in the school. The leaders are those who begin to appreciate working as a collective and recognize the power of a unified body working for all the children in their community. In describing the process of becoming a leader on a team, one parent explained that participation on a parent team had given her and *"other dedicated parents the opportunity to pick an issue, sit down at a table, and try to resolve it...and get some stuff done."* She described this experience as one that has become *"essential"* to her.

Although AOP's organizing focuses on school reform, several AOP parent leaders have become appointed or elected members of community organizations as well as district committees. This has included positions with a local Community Resource Board of the Philadelphia School District, a committee of the American Street Empowerment Zone, the leadership group of a Philadelphia neighborhood association, and the Philadelphia School District's state-mandated Empowerment Team. The histories of these AOP parent leaders illustrate how leadership development in one arena—education—can build leadership skills applicable to community and citywide issues.

AOP starts its leadership development at the individual school level, and this is the level where AOP is the strongest. Parents show the most dramatic changes in their leadership capabilities at the local school level. The changes also can be seen, however, within the governance and staffing of AOP, which is increasingly parent-led. Evidence of AOP's success in developing parents as education leaders includes: recognition of *parents' increased abilities, knowledge and skills* by parents themselves, teachers and principals; *parents taking on new roles in schools,* such as designing, finding funding for and leading after school programs; and *parents taking on key roles within AOP,* such as citywide co-chair, organizer and Board member.

Parents' Increased Abilities, Knowledge and Skills

Many AOP parents talk about the kinds of skills and knowledge they have gained as a result of being a part of AOP organizing. These include: learning to conduct "one-on-ones" (individual discussions with other parents to identify their concerns); creating agendas and leading meetings; researching issues; speaking in public; planning and carrying out public actions; and, most importantly, negotiating in the different power arenas—district, union, city—that have an impact on schools. Principals, teachers, and political leaders have noted the accomplishments of AOP's leadership development. In the following example, we look at the growth of parents as education leaders at the Welsh Elementary School and the impact on children's educational experience. Welsh is a K-6 elementary school of 835 students in a low-income African-American and Latino neighborhood.

A Welsh teacher described the change she saw in a parent who had a long history of working at the school prior to her association with AOP and who had been a president of the school's Home and School Association.

"AOP has transformed [the parent]. It has created a new context for her. She always used to help a lot around the school. But the Home and School people are speaking politically. They were not doing that before....She [the organizer] lets [the parent] be as strong as she can be. There are some strong parents here and AOP lets them act on their strengths."

The teacher also remarked on the change in the Home and School Association, from a primarily fundraising and social group to an independent group that sets its own agenda and addresses a range of "political" issues.

"[The Home and School Association] *used to raise candy money and pay for sixth grade graduation. And that was their main focus. And now they're talking about policies in the school district and, you know...bigger issues. I think that's really wonderful. That definitely comes through the AOP people. Home and School's a totally different organization."*

The teacher commented on the change of power relationships involved in this shift. She reported that in the past the Home and School had been *"under"* the principal. Now, she says, *"They [parents] have their own agenda. He [the principal] goes to some of their meetings, but not all of them."*

The principal also noted the change in the Home and School Association as an institution. Previous to AOP organizing, it had consisted of *"two or three ladies"* who mostly did some fundraising. Now attendance at Home and School meetings range from 25–30 parents. Before, the two or three active parents were all African-American; as a result of the relationships AOP has built among parents, the group now includes both African-Americans and Latinos.

The Home and School Association has begun to address a range of issues that concern parents, including campaigning for crossing guards at heavily trafficked intersections, gaining a parking lot for the teachers, implementing an after-school parent-run homework club, and addressing teacher vacancies. All of these issues have required parents to engage with local and city political leaders. The principal acknowledged changes he has seen in the parents.

"I see parents putting together their resumes, using technology and making out an application process to come to tutor [in the after-school program]. *I see them, with AOP's help, writing grants. They have honed their public speaking skills and speak intelligently. They have been motivated to go outside the school to political events, like when Mayor Street was at Edison High School, and they are speaking up at these events about what is needed."*

The principal recognizes how this individual development and the resulting changes in the Home and School Association can support the school. He is eager for a parking lot for teachers because of the high incidence of car vandalism in the area. He feels that with such added safety measures for teachers he could more easily recruit teachers, and that professional morale would improve.

"We met with two city councilmen regarding that issue [a parking lot for teachers]. *We also met with our Home and School Association. We've invited people from the maintenance division of the School District of Philadelphia to come and address that concern. That all did occur. I think that, again, a lot of that organization and direction occurred from AOP working with the Home and School Executive Board members. That's really where they were viable, that they didn't actually have to be totally visible . . .but provided the kind of*

support and staff development to get parents feeling comfortable to be able to be very articulate on an issue, to be able to dialogue with people, not to feel intimidated by them because they were, quote, city council people or school district executives or whatever."

Principals in other schools where AOP has established positive relations echo similar sentiments. For example, a principal at the Kelly Elementary School (K-4 with 1,100 students) related that after parents, organized by AOP, were elected to the Home and School Association, the Home and School led the effort to bring the 100 Book Challenge to his school, in order to increase the focus on reading both at school and at home. These parents, prior to their election to the Home and School Association, had worked with AOP on a number of other school-related issues: linking a church after-school program and classroom teachers in order to enhance homework support for children; raising funds for a playground renovation; obtaining classroom space in nearby community buildings to eliminate the use of mobile units on the playground as temporary classrooms as the means for dealing with overcrowding; obtaining a needed traffic light near the school; and instituting Safe Corridors, a program that organizes older community members to police the school area during times when children are going to and from school.

One Kelly parent commented on the ways that AOP organizing had changed both individuals and the school.

"*Over the years* [those] *who have come through the public school system* [have learned] *that they don't count, they don't matter, they are peons....*[AOP is] *giving them strength, and giving them—'oh, I can do something.' It has been so helpful because we have actually gotten things. It's just not marching, it's doing, it's getting the resources, and giving people another venue and actually is showing the progress.*"

Parents Taking on New Roles in the Education of Children

A major accomplishment of AOP parent leaders has been the establishment of parent-run after-school programs at several elementary schools. These programs provided the opportunity for parents to serve as teachers, program administrators, leaders of staff meetings, and liaisons with teachers. The programs also strengthen AOP's organizing by putting AOP into close contact with more parents and making visible AOP's role in improving children's educational experience.

Many parents readily supported the after-school programs because they felt that their children would benefit from an extended school day with homework help and academic enrichment. For many parents, English was a second language and they felt unable to provide their children with the help they needed. Others worked and found it difficult to give their children's homework a lot of attention. Another shared parent concern was the need for a safe place for children during after school hours. Although there were other after-school programs in some of the schools and neighborhoods now served by the AOP programs, the previously available programs did not offer enough places for all the children who needed after-school care and/or extra academic support, especially in the early grades.

When parents first approached one of the principals to request after-school programs, he told them he did not have the money in his budget to staff or operate any new after-school programs. This did not deter the parents who decided to raise funds and hire parents to create and run the programs. In order to handle the costs of stipends for parent-teachers and supplies, the parents needed to learn to write grant proposals. AOP organizers guided the leaders through this process, and ultimately three schools in one neighborhood received money from two community agencies for their first year. At an AOP public event, a representative of one of the granting agencies remarked that, "*Most of the professional development and resources we provide goes to teachers. But we see the importance of parents and community and have begun to pay attention there.*" AOP also helped interested parents learn to prepare resumes in order to apply for the after-school positions.

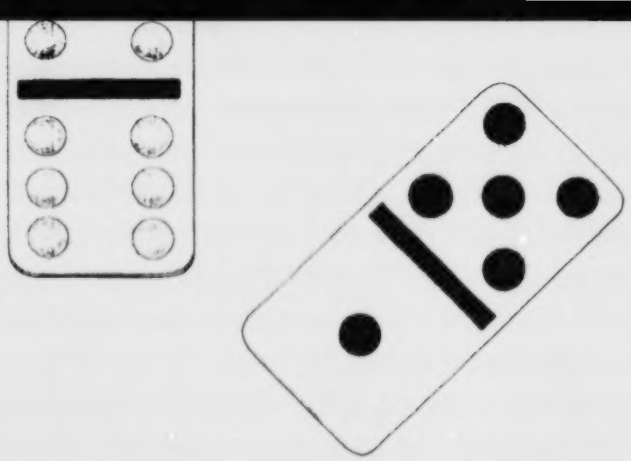
During its first year, which began in January 2000, the program took place at all three schools two afternoons a week. At each school, 20-40 children attended each afternoon. At two schools the focus was on homework help, and at one school with a large number of Spanish-speaking families the emphasis was on parents and children reading Spanish-language books together.

In addition to learning to run the programs, the parent-teachers also learned to lead staff meetings where they shared teaching experiences and strategies. Parent-teachers also discussed how to use the programs as a platform for building relationships with teachers and bringing more parents into the schools. One of the community agencies that funded the program provided professional development for the parents. The professional development focused on instructional techniques and the schools' curricula. A few classroom teachers gave parents ideas for classroom management, and teachers and parent-teachers together selected books for purchase to be given out weekly to participating families.

In its second year, the program increased the number of children served and added a third day. Two of the existing programs continued, one closed, and a new program opened in another neighborhood. New sources of funding were identified and one of the parent leaders who had become an AOP organizer was hired as director of all the after-school programs. The parent-teachers also re-shaped their programs in light of their experiences during the first year. At all three schools, the parent-teachers decided to target the program to children, K–2, who were identified by teachers as falling behind. The parent-teachers began to work more closely with classroom teachers who referred children they believed would benefit from the extra attention.

Working with young children was an unexpected pleasure for some of the parent-teachers. In a conversation with one parent about her role as parent-teacher the interviewer learned that,

"She hadn't realized that she liked working with kids until she did this. And she stressed that she was learning by helping the kids. I asked her what she was learning, and she talked about games, mentioning dominos in particular and that she hadn't realized games could help children learn math. She said that she is now doing these games at home with her children. As we talked, children called to her for help or to check their work. She smiled the entire time and seemed really comfortable in her role." FIELDNOTES FROM AN OBSERVATION OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM



During the same observation session, a Spanish-speaking parent who had rarely come to the school previously was reading books with English as a Second Language (ESL) students.

In interviews, teachers from the Welsh Elementary School noted that the homework of students attending the after-school program is completed more often than before and the extra practice has increased students' pride and motivation. The children now know more of the sight vocabulary in their reading program and feel more at ease in class. One teacher commented that the after-school program is beneficial because *"children are receiving extra small group instruction both academically and socially."*

At the McKinley School, the second year of the program brought new levels of parent-professional cooperation. One of the teachers was now working side-by-side with the parent-teachers in the after-school program. Her participation helped to ensure continuity between the classroom and the after-school program. The program drew more parents into the school and the Parent Leadership Team doubled to 24 members. A new principal was assigned to McKinley that year, and she was so pleased with the program and the level of parent involvement at her school that she sought funding for continuation of the after-school program during the 2001-02 school year.

Parents Taking on Roles in AOP as Citywide Co-chairs, Organizers and Board Members

From its beginnings, AOP has been committed to becoming a parent-led organization. Initially, AOP organizers were hired by local community development and service agencies in order to ground AOP organizing in established neighborhood groups. The complexities of working through multiple community groups with different philosophies about how to bring about change led AOP to hire its second cohort of organizers directly. Many from this second group came to AOP with previous community organizing experience, often outside of Philadelphia. Over time, however, AOP has developed a group of organizers who have come up through the organization. These organizers often began their involvement with AOP at a local school. They became active in AOP through participation on Parent Leadership Teams and many represented their team at citywide AOP meetings. This group gained leadership experience through serving as citywide co-chairs, leading research on issues that concerned parents, and representing AOP publicly. Their research often brought them into face-to-face dialogue with district and city decision-makers, including the superintendent, Board of Education members, City Council representatives, and union officials.

AOP's board was initially made up of representatives of the various advocacy groups that helped to form the organization. Currently, however, the board consists primarily of parents and community members from the neighborhoods where AOP is active. As board members, parents gain experience with organizational policy-making and learning how to run a non-profit group. The prominence of parents as organizers and on the board also serves to sustain AOP's work over time. AOP's executive director believes it *"adds depth"* to the organization because parents have a persistent commitment to improving their children's schools.

Second Indicator Area: School/Community Connection

The AOP relational organizing model naturally leads its work in the direction of bringing the school and local community closer together for the benefit of children. When AOP organizers, board members, and parent leaders describe the kinds of changes AOP organizing is trying to make, they often say that they are trying to change *"the culture of the school"* so that parents are regarded as a resource to children's education and participants in decision-making.

In this indicator area, we look primarily at the success AOP is having in engaging community members in school improvement efforts and involving education professionals in community issues that impact on local schools. Evidence of AOP accomplishment in this indicator area include *engagement of community members and agencies in local schools, increased parent-teacher collaboration* around issues affecting schools, and *extending the use of the school facility* to serve community needs.

Engagement of Community Members and Agencies in Improving Local Schools

"We as parents alone, you know, if we see ourselves only as parents, we actually deny our potential power of being residents and voters. So I think some of what will make our fight effective, and this might be a very personal view, from my point of view, yet I think some of what can make our fight truly effective is really actually seeing ourselves not just as parents, but as community people. And then pulling our community in on the fight."

ORGANIZER

Since its beginning, AOP has been working in an African-American neighborhood in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. This neighborhood has many active churches and community agencies, but before AOP organized the groups and churches, they did not involve themselves with the local schools. However, they responded positively to AOP parents' urging them to become more connected to efforts to improve conditions for learning in the schools. AOP work in this area of the city provides a solid example of AOP's success in bringing community resources to bear on improving local schools.

At the Kelly School, for example, community groups and AOP collaborated to respond to parent concerns about safety in the school area. Together, they started

a community-run, volunteer Safe Corridors program, through which senior community members patrol the school area during hours children are going to and from school. The parents and community groups also joined forces to fight for and win a needed traffic light, and insisted that a fence be built around the schoolyard after intruders harassed children playing there. In response to parent dissatisfaction with the use of temporary trailers as classrooms to alleviate overcrowding, community groups worked with AOP to find alternative spaces in community buildings.

By showing that it could engage community resources to help meet the needs at Kelly school, AOP built trust with the principal who was initially skeptical about opening the school to AOP. This growing trust made it possible for AOP to begin to address education issues more directly. For example, organizers connected several classroom teachers with a local church after-school program to coordinate better homework support for children in the program.

AOP parents also developed ways to involve community members in helping to improve children's reading. After carrying out research on supplementary reading improvement programs, the parents selected the 100 Book Challenge program. The parents brought the idea of using the 100 Book Challenge program to the school staff; staff and parents then formed a joint committee and launched a pilot effort in some grades. The committee members, parents, and ten teachers, wrote grants and were awarded funds to support the effort, including a $5,000 AOP Reading Initiative grant that AOP citywide had available for joint teacher-parent partnerships focused on reading. As part of this program, community members have come into the school as reading mentors. The program was so successful that it *"exploded"* to every grade.

In a North Philadelphia Latino and African-American community, connecting school and community took a different form. As a neighborhood characterized by close-knit family networks and a strong sense of community identity, this area was fertile ground for community organizing around issues concerning schools and children. While the neighborhood is served by several elementary schools, parents often have children in one school and nephews, nieces and cousins in one or two of the other nearby schools.

Parents from three elementary schools located a few blocks from one another began working cooperatively around the need to improve safety in the neighborhood. The parents wanted additional crossing guards at heavily trafficked intersections. They believed that the neighborhood warranted additional crossing guards because of the heavy traffic and because there was a lot of drug activity in the area. Parents from the three schools initiated a Crossing Guard Campaign, which was adopted by AOP citywide. They met with members of the local police force as well as with elected City Council representatives to discuss the problem and ask for their support in seeking solutions. At a public event, attended by both the local police and City Council representatives, the parents asked for a public commitment of assistance in seeking additional crossing guards in a number of neighborhoods where AOP was active.

In another campaign to improve both safety and children's academic achievement, the same group of parent leaders worked together successfully to get grants from community service and education agencies for after-school programs at the three schools. The head of one of the granting agencies said that these mini-grants to AOP for their after-school program were *"among the most successful."*

Increased Parent-Teacher Collaboration

At two of the North Philadelphia schools described above, teachers and parents have worked together around various initiatives. At the Welsh School, teachers and parents formed a joint AOP/PFT safety committee. Teachers supported the parents in the AOP Crossing Guard campaign and AOP parents, in turn, have worked to secure a parking lot for the teachers. In one action, a group of teachers joined AOP parents in blocking traffic at one of the intersections where they had requested a crossing guard.

"We need a crossing guard at 5th and York. [The AOP parent] *put flyers all over the school—everywhere—that the parents were going to go out and block traffic at the corner to get attention to what we need, and she asked teachers to join. Seventeen to 20 teachers joined the parents. We blocked the traffic for three mornings. We didn't go every day,*

but we went in small groups each day and joined with the parents. We had to leave to come back to class, while the parents continued. [The parent] *has a lot of respect in the school and she personally asked teachers to come."* WELSH TEACHER

When parents went to a community meeting to confront the mayor about the same issue, a small group of teachers also went. "*We didn't go with the parents, but both parents and teachers were there to speak up about the same thing.*" The same "respected" AOP parent also accompanied the principal to City Council to try to move along a promise for a parking lot for the teachers.

The AOP after-school programs at Welsh and McKinley have also helped to build collaboration between teachers and parents and bring the two groups closer together. At both schools, teachers refer children to the program and help to select books, and at McKinley, a teacher is now working alongside parent-teachers in the after-school program. Teachers at McKinley have donated money to the program for snacks and supplies. At Welsh, teachers have opened their classrooms to the after-school program, and invited parent-teachers to use classroom materials including books, computers and games. The teachers' cooperation with the parents is evidence of the teachers' appreciation of the work it took for parents to start and run an after-school program. It also shows growing regard for parents as a resource in the education of children.

In an effort to connect parents and teachers even more closely, AOP has been involved in a two-year relationship-building campaign with the PFT. Although initially central union leaders rebuffed AOP's approaches, at the local school level parent leaders and the union's Community Outreach Committee held parent-teacher dialogues at several schools. When the teachers' contract was being negotiated, AOP reached out again to central union officials, pushing for a community briefing. In fall 2000, the union held the briefing and AOP turned out parents and community groups for the event. Shortly afterwards, AOP co-sponsored a rally in support of the teachers. During this period, the parent-teacher dialogues at AOP schools helped to maintain communication between teachers and parents. At Welsh School, for example, the PFT building representative described the process as "*[building] connection.... I met with the people in AOP. And [a parent] also came to union things. So, we had the connection....I think it was helpful. I felt that we got a lot of support from the parents.... It's about 10 teachers and 10 parents that are the communicators back and forth.*"

After the contract issues were resolved, AOP continued to work with the Community Outreach Committee to build relations with the union. During summer 2001, the two groups co-sponsored a series of discussions based on shared readings. Topics included accounts of other cities where parents, communities and unions were working together and possible strategies for moving the PFT toward a greater concern with social justice.

At the McKinley School, the teacher-parent dialogues helped to lay the groundwork for other collaborative efforts. McKinley parents worked with the principal, teachers, and a local cultural group to have McKinley designated the site for a community mural. Planning and painting the mural helped to build trust among the groups. As an outgrowth of this project, the principal, librarian, special education teacher, and AOP parents are developing a multicultural curriculum. Work on the mural, along with the after-school program and the parent-teacher dialogues, have led to a new Home and School Association and a Local School Council with increased parent participation in decision-making.

AOP organizing at the middle school level is more recent, but even here AOP has already started to build relations with teachers. At deBurgos Middle School, AOP began by building relations with the PFT Building Committee. At the Pickett Middle School in Germantown, AOP parents have met with a group of teachers to re-examine the school's discipline policy. As a result of these discussions, parents expect to be better informed about discipline issues at the school and teachers anticipate that parents will be better able to support them in enforcing discipline.

Extending the Use of the School Facility

AOP after-school programs have extended the use of school facilities beyond regular school hours. During the first year, the after-school program used a library at one school, a couple of classrooms in another, and a specially designated room in a third. In the second year, with increases in the numbers of children and parents involved, additional spaces have been made available.

Several of the schools have opened their facilities to evening citywide AOP meetings. These meetings bring community people into the school to work on improving children's educational experience. In addition, through the participation of neighborhood, district and elected leaders in these meetings, schools become central places for addressing both school and community issues.

Third Indicator Area: Social Capital

Building "social capital"—relationships of trust and reciprocity—is central to AOP's goal of increasing parent engagement in schools. As one AOP organizer reflected, initially parents may be present in schools, but are often relatively isolated. Even though parents bring their children to school or even volunteer at the school, they are usually on their own. In describing AOP's work with parents, the organizer said that, "*We really are the ones that are trying to build and develop these relational networks.*" AOP has looked both inside the school, to strengthen relationships among the principal, parents, and teachers, and outside the school to the local community. In this report, we present two measures of AOP's success in building social capital: strengthened *parent-community networks* and new *reciprocal relationships between parents and teachers.*

Parent/Community Networks

"People aren't generally relating to one another in the capacity of school and education. Not in our community. We had a difficult time getting the community really involved in the issues that face their schools, because they're not, we're used to just sending our children to school and letting the school handle it. That's why it is so difficult in our community. But we've done that. At Kelly School, we've done a remarkable job." PARENT LEADER

In the Germantown area, AOP parent leaders have successfully drawn in a network of community groups and community members to become involved at Kelly School. One member of a Germantown community group, who has become an AOP Board member, noted that in his neighborhood, which has many active community groups, AOP is unique in its focus on the schools. Over the past several years, he explains, AOP has been successful in creating bridges between the school and community, bringing the resources of churches, community groups, lawyers, doctors—*"everything that exists in Germantown"*—to the school. This community leader argues that AOP has made the education of neighborhood children visible in the community. It was AOP's organizing that *"brought the issue to the front, to the forefront."*

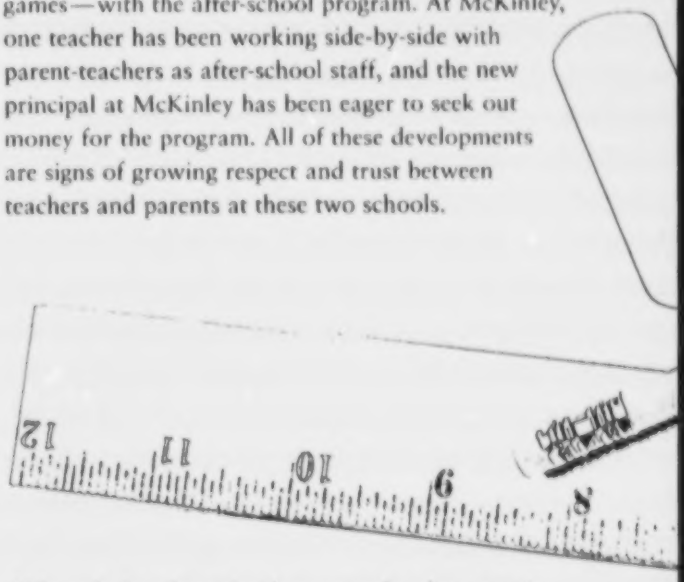
According to the community leader, AOP has been able to organize across social class boundaries. AOP galvanized community members from all sectors to volunteer as mentor readers in the school as part of the 100 Book Challenge. Senior citizens have volunteered to patrol the streets as part of the Safe Corridors initiative. A local pastor facilitated coordination between the teachers in his church's after-school program and classroom teachers, in order to improve homework help for children. Community groups have provided classroom space in their buildings to relieve overcrowding. Emblematic of the strengthened community network was a public forum jointly sponsored by several of the community groups and AOP during the mayoral campaign. Speaking in concert, audience members focused the candidates on public education and demanded that they explain their position on a range of key education issues.

Relationships of Reciprocity Between Parents and Teachers

At the schools where AOP Parent Leadership Teams have sustained their efforts over time, new kinds of relationships with teachers are developing. The principal at Welsh School, where AOP has organized over the past three years, commented that, *"Since AOP became involved...I think that there has just been a very strong bond that has taken place, that there's a mutual degree of respect and rapport between all the stakeholders in the school."* Similarly, the principal at the Kelly School, where AOP has worked for 5 years, noted that, *"Everyone's working now...There [had been] a history of fragmentation."*

These new kinds of relationships are especially apparent in the ways in which teachers and parents at Welsh and McKinley Schools are working together around their after-school programs. For example, at both schools parent-teachers are in regular communication with teachers about the students they have referred. Parent-teachers give classroom teachers regular reports about how students are doing with homework assignments and their perceptions of children's academic progress. Because parent-teachers become so familiar with the children through working with them intensively in small groups, teachers find that the parents are able to assist them in assessing areas where students need help.

The teachers are also finding that the parent-teachers play a valuable role as liaison to other parents. As one Welsh teacher pointed out, *"Parents will come to her [parent-teacher] before they come to me to deliver a message. And they [parents] feel comfortable because they know she's a parent and a part of the school."* In this teacher's opinion, the after-school program is fulfilling two needs: it helps children who are not doing well in the classroom or who do not have help at home, and it is a tool for strengthening communication between teachers and parents. Other teachers in the school shared similar sentiments about their interactions with the after-school staff. Welsh classroom teachers have been willing to open their rooms and share their materials—computers, books, games—with the after-school program. At McKinley, one teacher has been working side-by-side with parent-teachers as after-school staff, and the new principal at McKinley has been eager to seek out money for the program. All of these developments are signs of growing respect and trust between teachers and parents at these two schools.



Although the after-school program has been particularly strong ground on which to build new kinds of parent-teacher interactions, other venues have also contributed. At the McKinley school, an AOP-sponsored teacher-parent dialogue helped teachers and parents to identify areas to work on together, such as teacher vacancies and school security. At Welsh, according to the principal, when teachers saw the participation of 25-30 parents in the Home and School Association, *"It changed the perception of the teachers that came. They saw parents who cared."* Teachers and AOP parents have also built collaboration out in the community, as when a group of seventeen teachers left their classrooms and joined parents in blocking traffic at an intersection near the school where the parents wanted a crossing guard.

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Fourth Indicator Area: Equity

AOP organizing is directed at making Philadelphia public schools as strong as the best schools around, in Philadelphia and elsewhere. Philadelphia parents are familiar with the resources available in Philadelphia's prestigious private schools and in schools in nearby suburbs where children are thriving and learning. Parents are aware of the disparity between these schools and those in Philadelphia's low-income communities. They also recognize differences within the district; some have had the experience of moving their children from one district school to another only to discover different expectations in the level of work being assigned.

"It [equity] *has always been a powerful concept, because it's always been a comparison...okay, how come all children are the same basically, and we, how come because we live in a lower income neighborhood do we have to get less, our children have to drink out of lead fountains, our kids got to play in dirt, we don't have music lessons, we don't get gym until the second half of the year. But if you travel five minutes up the road to one of these prestigious schools, their kids* [have these things] *but not mine."* AOP PARENT LEADER

AOP parents have also developed strong images of successful schools in neighborhoods with demographics similar to theirs, through the AOP Effective Education Campaign, which has taken groups of parents on visits to schools in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, and New York. These images drive AOP organizing.

"We spend a lot of time to get the best that we can for our children and trying to make sure their education is not just mediocre.... As parents, our mistake is that as long as we see our children bringing home 95s and report cards with As and Bs, we assume they're doing great. But then when you compare it to a district like Cheltenham [a Philadelphia suburb] *or even another school in the District, the As and Bs we're getting here are Cs and Ds somewhere else."* PARENT LEADER, NOW ORGANIZER

Although initially AOP was intended to work in all or most of the city's schools, as its resources became more stretched, it began to focus on schools in some of the city's lowest-income and most racially and ethnically isolated neighborhoods. Nonetheless, through its citywide work building partnerships with other organizing and policy advocacy groups such as the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), and the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF), AOP has increased its leverage and played a role in securing resources for schools beyond the small group in which it has Parent Leadership Teams. AOP's accomplishments in the indicator area of equity include: *bringing in new financial resources for after-school programs and for crossing guards; re-directing the after-school program to children most in need of additional academic support;* and partnering with other organizations for the purpose of *waging a citywide campaign to address inequities in teacher vacancies and teacher quality.*

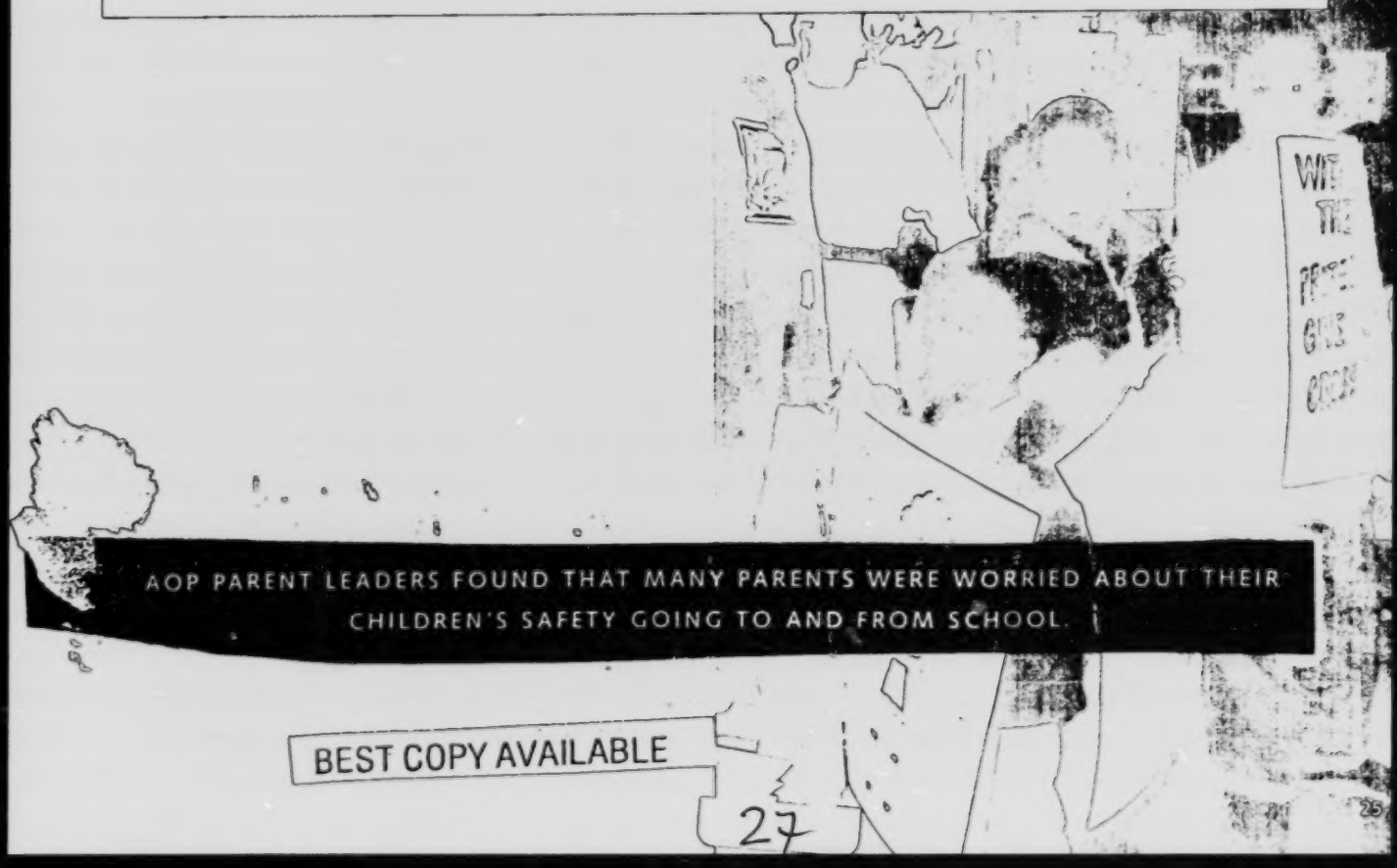
Bringing in New Financial Resources to Schools for After-School Care and for Crossing Guards

When AOP first proposed an after-school program in one of the schools, the principal told parents that he did not have staff or money. Undaunted, the parent leader came up with the idea that AOP could seek funds to support a parent-run after-school program.

AOP parent leaders proceeded to write grants for funding and brought in money from several local groups to cover the costs of parent-teachers' stipends and supplies, including books that could be sent home weekly with every child participant. Although the dollar amount per school was not large—about $6,000—it allowed the programs to get started in three schools. One of the funding groups, the Philadelphia Education Fund, augmented its financial support with professional development for the parents. In the second year, AOP succeeded in raising money from new sources, including the School District of Philadelphia, to continue the programs. By the third year the principal of the McKinley School was helping to raise funds for her school as well.

AOP has also brought in new resources through its citywide Crossing Guard campaign. Through listening campaigns involving one-on-one and small group meetings with parents, AOP parent leaders found that many parents were worried about their children's safety going to and from school. As part of their research into how to increase safety in the school area, parent leaders investigated the assignment of crossing guards, and discovered a police survey of several years back that indicated a need for more crossing guards. The number of crossing guards had been allowed to decrease through attrition. Those survey results, however, had never been made public. The AOP parents' research findings confirmed their fears for the safety of neighborhood children.

The parents identified corners where crossing guards had once been stationed, but were no longer assigned. These were mostly in low-income areas; more middle class areas were still well covered. At an AOP public event attended by several City Council members, a parent leader poignantly stated how indignant she felt learning that crossing guards had been maintained in higher-income neighborhoods but not hers. "*We are being neglected. We need more attention. We might be in North Philadelphia. We might be in the ghetto. But we are human beings.*"



AOP PARENT LEADERS FOUND THAT MANY PARENTS WERE WORRIED ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S SAFETY GOING TO AND FROM SCHOOL.

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AOP began to work with a City Council member on this issue. After two years of persistent agitation, including two public hearings on the issue sponsored by the Council member, City Council allocated money to the police for additional guards. Staff in the Councilman's office reported that AOP was an excellent partner in the effort. *"The parent leadership is knowledgeable and articulate....They provide substantive evidence and excellent testimonies and reports."* The next step for AOP was to ensure that the police department hired crossing guards and assigned them to corners near their schools and at other dangerous intersections in low-income neighborhoods.

Re-directing the After-School Program to Children Most in Need of Additional Academic Support

In its first year, the after-school program was available to any children whose parents were interested in having them attend. In the second year of the program, however, the parent-teachers decided to use the program more strategically. There was little after-school support available for children in the earliest grades (K–2) because the schools' resources were being directed toward after-school tutoring for children in the older grades to prepare them for the standardized tests by which the school was held accountable for student progress. The parent-teachers believed that if they could assist children in academic difficulty early, their efforts could help avoid problems in the future. For these reasons, the parents decided to gear the after-school programs toward younger children, especially those who could not get at-home support because English was not spoken at home or because parents were working. The parent-teachers worked closely with classroom teachers to identify children most in need of the kinds of support the after-school programs could offer.

Waging a Citywide Campaign to Address Inequities in Teacher Vacancy and Teacher Quality

As was true in urban sites across the country, Philadelphia in the late 1990s began losing teachers faster than it was replacing them. Within the city, low-income neighborhoods often suffered the most from vacancies and inadequately qualified substitutes. This issue came up often in AOP-sponsored one-on-ones and house meetings as early as 1997. Parents told organizers and leaders that they were worried about teacher absences and classrooms without assigned teachers. The consequences of this teacher shortage—classes taught by short-term substitutes, classrooms combined or children reassigned to other groups—deprived their children of opportunities for learning. The box below contains the story of how AOP organized a campaign that over several years brought them into relationship with a range of different interests—other community-based groups, policy advocacy groups, the district, the city, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers—to begin to address the related issues of teacher vacancies and teacher quality.

"Our Work Is Hard" The AOP Campaign to Reduce Teacher Vacancies in Philadelphia Schools

Parents within AOP began to express their concerns about teacher absences, unfilled teacher positions, and the scarcity of substitute teachers as early as 1997, before the issue of the spiraling number of teacher vacancies was widely discussed in Philadelphia. In response to the concerns of parents, AOP parent leaders began to research the reasons for and possible solutions to the lack of qualified teachers in their schools. They interviewed School Board members, the Superintendent, the District's Human Resources staff, and City Council members. After gathering information, AOP organizers and leaders brought back to a citywide meeting what they had learned so the group could determine which entity—City Council, the School Board, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, or the Pennsylvania State Legislature—had the power to make the kinds of changes that could improve the situation. Many of the city's advocacy groups thought that the city's residency requirement was a major obstacle to teacher recruitment. AOP concurred and decided to focus its campaign initially toward City Council action on that issue.

In May 1999, after gathering information at their local schools about teacher shortages anticipated for the coming school year, AOP held a citywide accountability session where they stated their intention to partner with the District and other public school advocates in demanding that City Council declare a moratorium on the city residency requirement. The Superintendent, the head of District Human Resources, the President and Vice President of the School Board, and a City Council member attended. One hundred and fifty AOP parents and their supporters were present. AOP also focused on areas within the district's control: signing bonuses, cumbersome recruitment processes, and minority recruitment. The day after the public accountability session, the district announced incentives to attract new teachers to Philadelphia. Later that week, AOP and other advocates crowded City Council chambers during a session in which Council members were scheduled to discuss and vote on the residency requirement. City Council did relax the law that year, allowing teachers three years to become city residents.

The following year, AOP turned its attention to the teachers' union, which was entering into contract negotiations with the district. AOP leaders scrutinized the teacher contract and found that many aspects of the contract had implications for retaining experienced teachers in schools in low-income neighborhoods. When the new school year started, AOP was ready with a parent survey called, "What does the teachers' contract mean to me and my child?" The central union leadership got wind of the survey and tried to quash it, but AOP persisted and over 600 surveys were filled out.

Despite uneasy relations with the central union leadership, which consistently resisted the participation of parents in talks about contract negotiations, AOP was able to work with the union's Community Outreach Committee to co-sponsor parent-teacher "dialogues" at seven schools. These dialogues were an opportunity to identify shared parent/teacher interests and build trust at the school level between teachers and parents. Based on their own examination of the teacher contract and what they found out from teachers about factors contributing to high turnover, AOP formulated two demands: 1) a teacher not be allowed to request a transfer from a school until s/he had taught there for at least three years, and 2) teachers be required to give earlier notification of their intention to transfer or leave the system, so that classrooms could be staffed before the beginning of the following school year. AOP also supported reducing classroom size and raising teacher salaries.

In fall 2000, at a time when negotiations were extremely tense, the central union leadership, under pressure from AOP, held a briefing for parents and community organizations. AOP agreed to do outreach for the briefing, and, as a result, over a dozen organizations participated. Although AOP's relationship with central union leadership is not strong, in the final contract negotiations, many of the issues that AOP raised were addressed. AOP continues to work with the Community Outreach Committee to build dialogue between parents and teachers, and parent leaders work directly with small groups of interested teachers at all of the schools where AOP is organizing.

The contract changes did not result in immediate improvements in staffing; AOP leaders realized that changes in the contract and in residency requirements were not enough to resolve the teacher shortage. AOP leaders persisted with the issue through 2001, forming partnerships with another organizing group, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), and with an advocacy group, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), in order to leverage AOP's power. These partnerships formed the basis for a broader effort, the Citywide Neighborhood Schools Initiative. In January 2001, AOP and ACORN began interviewing principals of schools in neighborhoods where they were working to document teacher vacancies. Based on their interviews and data from the district, they showed that the greatest number of teacher vacancies were in the lowest-income neighborhoods of the city, two African-American and one Latino and African-American neighborhood. Meanwhile, PCCY began to gather information about approaches other urban areas were taking to deal with teacher shortages in low-income areas.

The activities of AOP and other organizations around this issue brought repeated press attention to the problem. In March 2001, AOP with ACORN brought 75 parents to a Board of Education meeting to report on their findings about teacher vacancies in their neighborhood schools. PCCY and AOP published a joint report, "The Citywide Neighborhood Schools Initiative: Who Will Teach Our Children?" which detailed teacher shortages in Philadelphia and the factors that discourage teachers from coming to Philadelphia, and made recommendations for remedying the situation. In order to gain visibility for the issue, PCCY hosted an open forum on the teacher vacancy issue with a panel composed of representatives from the district, the state, the teachers' union, and the media. A small group of AOP leaders was present to ask questions and keep their issues to the forefront.

One of the lessons of AOP research into teacher vacancy in Philadelphia is that the problem cannot be solved without solving the district's budget issues. One AOP leader commented that at her school they were losing teachers because of budget cuts, so they might not be able to offer art, music, and other subjects. She remarked that involvement with the teacher vacancy issue has taught her *"a lot of this cannot be resolved without the funds. It comes down to the funding."* In order to continue the effort to resolve the problem of teacher vacancies, AOP has turned its attention toward the state, working for full funding of Philadelphia's public schools.

One way to assess the growth of AOP's ability to leverage its school-based work for broader impact is to look at the further development of the kinds of relationships that have initiated the Citywide Neighborhood Schools Initiative, which brings together a grassroots, parent-based perspective and policy advocacy to improve Philadelphia's public education.

Future Directions

The start-up of AOP, linked to the *Children Achieving* reform plan and its commitment to "empowered parents and community," indicated that many Philadelphia school reformers recognized the need for outside forces pushing the system to help catalyze and sustain change in the district. However, AOP's connection with *Children Achieving* did not automatically legitimize its organizing efforts at the school level among principals and teachers. Furthermore, the central office faced competing demands from other components of the *Children Achieving* programs. The pressure to focus on implementation of standards and an accountability system, and to show improved test results in order to build a case for increased state funding, led the district to compromise on its commitment to decentralization.

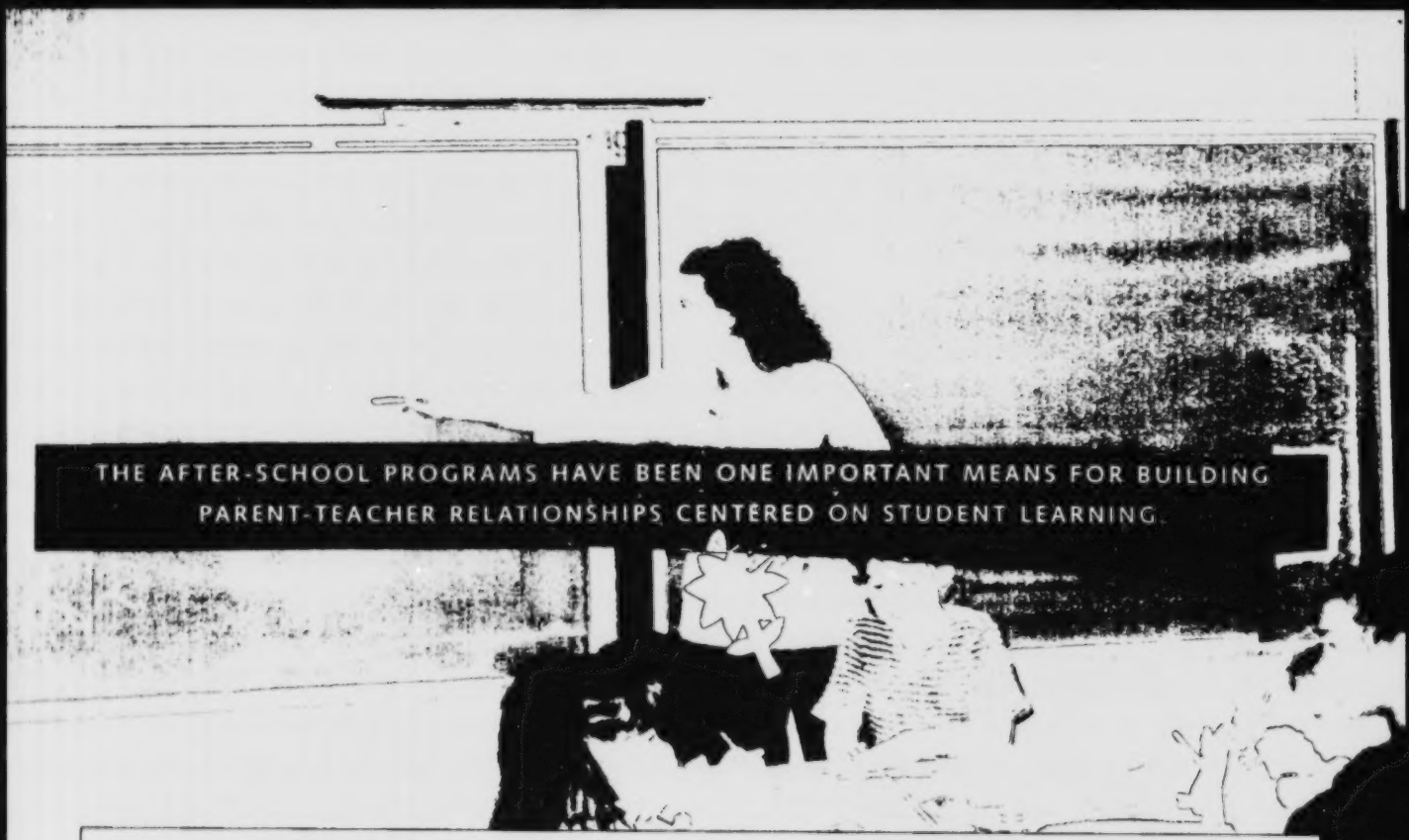
As stated in this report, AOP realized early on that it needed an independent identity from *Children Achieving*. Establishing AOP as a partner to, but independent from *Children Achieving* was a major task of its first executive director. An achievement of AOP is its survival and continued work after the end of *Children Achieving*, the departure of Superintendent Hornbeck, and the termination of the Annenberg funding that had supported it during its start-up years. This transition was the major task of its second executive director. Two years after the end of *Children Achieving*, the post-*Children Achieving* context for Philadelphia's public schools is not yet clear. AOP's third executive director is working within a prolonged transition during which time the state has assumed control of Philadelphia's schools, dismantled the Board of Education, and appointed a state School Reform Commission, which is moving toward greater privatization of the system.

The struggle for AOP to establish a base in the schools from which it could connect with principals and teachers and build new kinds of relations between education professionals and parents has been both a major challenge and an area of achievement. As AOP moves forward, it faces additional challenges: *deepening and sustaining the work in the seven schools where it is now established* and *expanding the organizing to new schools; building on its existing relationships with teachers at local schools and through the union;* and *continuing to leverage its school-level work to impact policy and bring about system-wide change.*

Deepening, Sustaining, and Expanding its School-Level Organizing

At the current time AOP organizers are, for the most part, parents who have come up through the organization. They have benefited from participation in AOP as parent leaders, citywide co-chairs, intern organizers, and Board members. They have helped to ground AOP in seven schools in two neighborhoods, North Philadelphia and Germantown. Among the challenges this group of organizers face is the need to continuously replenish the Parent Leadership Teams in these schools so that the organizing is sustained as the first and second generations of parent leaders move on with their children to the next school level. AOP must also constantly assess with parents the situation within the district, which has been in flux since the end of *Children Achieving*, connecting local concerns with evolving policies that are changing the shape of public education in the city.

At the seven schools where AOP has a history of accomplishment, a major challenge, in the words of one organizer, is to *"make sure the work inside schools is rigorous and standards-based."* This organizer believes that as AOP's work in this set of schools matures, parent leaders must push toward examining instruction and curriculum and holding schools accountable for students' learning. In order to build the capacity to do this, AOP must help parents to look more closely at student work, assignment of teachers, grades, and standardized test scores, to be sure that they understand what their children are doing and where there is need for improvement. This role could be especially important if the district is privatized; it is one way of ensuring public accountability for improvement.



THE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN ONE IMPORTANT MEANS FOR BUILDING PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS CENTERED ON STUDENT LEARNING.

In thinking about expanding its organizing to new schools, AOP is looking especially at neighborhood feeder patterns—middle and high schools where there are likely to be parents who have already had experience with AOP at the elementary school level. AOP has been assessing ways to sustain momentum at current sites when organizers move on and shift their focus toward new schools. Finally, AOP is considering the balance between expanding its organizing to new sites and deepening the organizing at existing sites; one consideration is the question of how broad-based AOP's school-level organizing needs to be to exert a credible influence within the system. If the district is privatized with different vendors in control of different schools, AOP will need to reconsider its strategies for having broader impact.

Throughout its history, AOP has reached out to local faith communities, seeking the support of churches and other religious congregations for local schools. On occasion, churches and synagogues have provided space for meetings of AOP Parent Leadership Teams, when they were not yet welcome in a local school, and/or for citywide public events. Several influential pastors have participated in AOP public actions, indicating their interest in closer cooperation between faith communities and the local schools.

In Germantown, where AOP has been able to draw on active community groups including the support of several religious congregations, community engagement has been critical to the organizing successes at the Kelly School. In the future, AOP aims to increase its work with local faith communities in order to build the neighborhood base of support for school reform.

In the past, AOP has only on occasion worked in coordination with student groups. Early in its history AOP did organize at a high school, and parent leaders began to build relations with a student organizing group. AOP work at this high school, however, died down. As AOP once again looks toward organizing at high schools, it intends to try to work more closely with student groups at those schools.

Building on AOP's Existing Relationships with Teachers

AOP has developed a number of ways of reaching out to teachers in the schools where it is active. The after-school programs have been one important means for building parent-teacher relationships centered on student learning. These programs have turned the parent-professional relationship into one of bilateral exchange. AOP has also connected with teachers

through union building committees. In a few instances, parents and teachers have built trust through co-sponsorship of dialogues by AOP and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). In one school, the PFT building committee and the parents have formed a joint safety committee. In another school, the AOP/PFT dialogues led to collaboration of parents and teachers with a community cultural group on a school mural, which in turn has led to joint work developing a multicultural curriculum. In other schools, parents and teachers have come together around issues of mutual concern, such as the discipline policy.

As these examples show, there is no formula for building partnerships between teachers and parents at the local school level. AOP's approach has varied, depending on the opportunities at a given school. Organizers and parent leaders, however, believe that a key to their future success is pushing to bring teachers more fully into the organizing process. Visits to other community organizing groups in Oakland and Austin, where community organizers are working directly with teachers and/or teachers are leaders and members of the community organizing group, have given AOP some new ideas for expanding their work with teachers.

In addition, AOP plans to continue to work at the citywide level on issues that relate to teachers across the district. A next step in the teacher quality campaign is to work with other groups in support of a strong teacher mentor program in order to help retain new teachers and assist veteran teachers who are struggling. AOP will also continue its outreach to the central union leadership and its work with the PFT Community Outreach Committee, looking for opportunities to leverage its work at local schools to build parent-teachers relations into broader forums and more powerful relationships that can influence policy.

Impacting Policy and System-Wide Change

An important aspect of AOP organizing is analyzing the environment in which they are working and making strategic decisions about the power arenas they need to work in to catalyze change. AOP has begun to build relations in a number of these arenas, for example, with selected City Council representatives, with district leadership, and with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

One of the most promising set of relationships that AOP has been building is with policy advocacy groups. One example of this work is the formation of the Citywide Neighborhood Schools Initiative. In this collaborative effort, AOP brings a grassroots perspective and parent base that adds to the work of advocacy groups. For example, AOP, working in conjunction with ACORN, was able to document the reality of teacher vacancies and the tumult it causes daily for children in some of Philadelphia's lowest-income neighborhoods. The testimony of AOP parents added a complementary and powerful voice to those of advocacy groups. Similarly, AOP has been able to add a parent perspective to the debate about the proposed privatization of the Philadelphia School District. AOP parents have participated in rallies, lobbied state representatives, and testified before City Council. It is the intention of AOP to continue to build relationships with key players in different power arenas and identify ways to leverage its work at the local school level to influence policy decisions that have citywide impact.

Case Study:
AUSTIN INTERFAITH

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Introduction to Austin Interfaith

With a focus on the well-being of families, Austin Interfaith has worked to connect community institutions that can support them, including schools, congregations, and civic organizations. In addition to strengthening institutional ties, Austin Interfaith also builds the capacity of family members to participate fully in the economic system. In the sixteen years that Austin Interfaith has been working on issues of concern to its members, it has been a catalyst in increasing public and private sector investment in families and neighborhoods through a number of initiatives. Viewing schools as key neighborhood institutions, Austin Interfaith works directly with eighteen public schools. It has also engaged businesses benefiting from city tax abatements in a living wage campaign, and partnered with the business community and Austin Community College to develop Capital IDEA, a program that provides long-term training and connections to jobs for adults in the community.

Adult education and public school reform are intertwined in Austin Interfaith's work. Its members have won millions of dollars in funding from the city and county to support Capital IDEA ($2 million pledged) as well as funding for adult ESL classes, after-school programs in twenty-eight schools, and $3.6 million in citywide school playground renovations. Each one of these efforts represents countless hours of organizing, reverses as well as forward movement, persistence, and constant "re-organizing" to maintain gains and continue momentum to win power, resources and desired changes.

For example, in the late 1980s Austin Interfaith engaged in an effort to influence spending for school construction. One tactic was to gather votes to defeat a bond issue that failed to direct funds to low-income schools most in need of repair and expansion. When the bond issue was amended so that low-income schools would benefit, Austin Interfaith leaders marshaled support for it. This "win" energized Austin Interfaith members, showed the power that low-income communities could wield through organized collective action, and increased Austin Interfaith's legitimacy and clout in the city.

The work of Austin Interfaith ranges across all eight indicator areas used in this project.[1] In this report, we point to measures of Austin Interfaith's accomplishments in its education reform efforts in four of the areas.[2] The four areas are:

- LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- HIGH QUALITY CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
- PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY
- SCHOOL/COMMUNITY CONNECTION

THE ALLIANCE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

IAF affiliates in Texas began work in public schools in the mid-1980s. IAF leaders developed a vision of schools with greater community involvement and a collaborative school culture that would challenge students and raise their achievement levels. The leaders formed a network of schools, known as the Alliance Schools Initiative, which by 2000 had grown to 118 schools. These schools serve low- to moderate-income communities in cities in the Southwest with IAF affiliates. In 1993, leaders in Texas IAF affiliates convinced the state legislature to provide funding for schools willing to innovate to improve student achievement, as long as the schools made a commitment to include community involvement as part of their restructuring strategies. The funding stream, called the Investment Capital Fund, is not limited to Alliance Schools. The amount of funding for the Investment Capital Fund, now at $20 million, has increased ten-fold from the original commitment.

NOTES

1. For a chart representing Austin Interfaith's work in all eight indicator areas, see Appendix C. This chart is not comprehensive, but does illustrate the kinds of strategies Austin Interfaith has used in each area and examples of its achievements.

2. The data supporting the accomplishments of Austin Interfaith were gathered during site visits in spring and fall 2000. The report is not comprehensive of all Austin Interfaith has accomplished, but is intended to illustrate what documentation and measurement of its accomplishments might look like.

Austin Interfaith

Austin Interfaith is an affiliate of the Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) Network, founded in the mid-1970s. Austin Interfaith, founded in 1985, is a multi-issue coalition of forty-five religious congregations, schools, and other institutions. It is one of the most diverse of the Texas IAF affiliates in its membership, ranging across religious denominations, economic levels, neighborhoods, and ethnic groups. While its member congregations are geographically distributed throughout Austin, many of the Alliance schools are on the East side of Austin and have significant numbers of low-income African-American, Asian and Hispanic students (although in some of the schools, less than 60 percent of the students are eligible for free lunch, and these schools, therefore, do not qualify for Title I funds.)

Austin Interfaith staff includes a Lead Organizer and two other full-time professional organizers. The staff is ethnically and racially diverse. The Lead Organizer is a white female and one organizer is an African-American male, the other a Hispanic female. Its co-chairs, a group of twelve leaders from among the member institutions, govern the organization. Agendas are also set through a collective leadership group (leaders from across member institutions) and an annual delegate assembly that draws hundreds of constituents.

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The City and the "New Economy"

The geography of Austin is partly defined by Interstate 35, which cuts through the city north to south and creates a physical boundary between the West side, whose population is more affluent and white, and the generally low-income and Hispanic East side. While the economic and social segregation in Austin is not absolute—some neighborhoods on either side of I-35 are diverse—most people in Austin consider the I-35 boundary an important symbol of economic and social inequality in the city. In relation to public education, segregation by ethnicity and economic level translates to fewer resources, and lower teacher quality and more turnover in the East side schools. Additional education concerns include access to magnet programs, high drop-out rates among low-income minority students, the availability and quality of bilingual programs, aging facilities, and concerns about safe passage to and from school—all in the face of shrinking school budgets. A busing program aimed at desegregating the Austin elementary schools ended over ten years ago, but the district never completely fulfilled promises to compensate by providing additional funds for low-income schools to recruit and retain teachers and improve their academic programs.

Austin's high tech economy boomed during the 1990s, and its population, wealth and property values grew significantly. Austin's experience is a reflection of an increasingly globalized and technologically advanced "new" economy. Those who benefit most from the high tech economy are well-educated and sophisticated career builders. While highly educated workers from all over the U.S. arrived to capitalize on Austin's boom, the city's immigrant population was also growing. Hispanic, Southeast Asian, and African-American adults and children in low-income areas of Austin, who lacked access to high quality schools and adult education opportunities, found themselves toiling on the lowest rungs of the high-tech ladder or left out of the "new economy" altogether. Just as I-35 divides Austin geographically, the split between high tech and service-oriented economies divides its workforce.

The Alliance Schools Initiative in Austin

"The Alliance Schools Initiative...is not just about improving the existing system of public education, but is instead about changing the culture of schools and of entire neighborhoods. Similarly, the Alliance Schools Initiative is not just about parental engagement, but is also designed to engage all of the stakeholders in public education...teachers, principals, and other members of the community.... In changing the culture of a campus, organizers ...begin by teaching parents and educators the art of conversation...which involves a reciprocal exchange of ideas, debate and compromise. [It] is relational and also the basis for what we call Civil Society in a community." FROM ALLIANCE SCHOOLS CONCEPT PAPER, FALL 1998

The Alliance Schools vision for public schools, articulated in the 1998 Alliance Schools Concept Paper, developed out of more than a decade of experience of Texas IAF affiliates engaging with individual schools to improve education in their member congregations' neighborhoods. The Fort Worth affiliate is credited as the first to engage over a long period with a local school, Morningside Middle School. Morningside is a predominately African-American school with test scores at the bottom of the list. The Morningside story spans a period of over ten years, starting in 1986, and exemplifies hard work and persistence on the part of the organizers, congregations and community members, teachers and the principal. The school eventually showed gains in test scores, but, just as significant, it also developed a more collaborative professional environment and increased school/community connection.

The experience of Forth Worth's IAF affiliate with Morningside Middle School inspired other Texas affiliates to work directly with schools as institutions. In 1990, Texas IAF leaders developed "The Texas IAF Vision for Public Schools: Communities of Learners,"

a formal statement of the philosophy, values, and goals underlying its work with schools. The document called for changing the "culture" of schools to reflect the values of collaboration and community engagement. This vision of public schools does not advocate specific programs, but rather emphasizes building the capacity to carry out processes for hearing the concerns of everyone in the school community, developing innovative responses, and reflecting on the effort. The IAF feels strongly that, in addition to creating a broad and committed constituency for public schools, changing the culture of schools is also essential to prepare students to meet the demands of the new information-based economy.

While the concepts laid out in the Texas IAF Vision for Public Schools have evolved and changed over the years, the basic tenets have endured. In 1993, Texas IAF leaders also influenced the state education agency to establish the Investment Capital Fund, which supports school reform that engages parents and communities. Any school in the state can apply for money from this fund, as long as its reform proposal includes the community and parents as authentic partners. Texas IAF affiliates have been able to sustain the state's commitment and even increase the size of the Investment Capital Fund through several state administrations of both parties.

Austin Interfaith began to work with schools in the late 1980s when education issues came up in house meetings with congregation members. Parent leaders began working with two schools on the East side on issues of safety and playgrounds. While parents were able to raise money and get a playground built in one of the schools, Austin Interfaith was not satisfied with the level of its involvement with the first two schools, especially knowing the successes of IAF affiliates in other cities. They found that there was resistance among principals to any deeper involvement.

When leaders began work with Zavala Elementary School in East Austin, they sought and won the principal's commitment to public conversation that included all of the school's stakeholders. This principal had won his position with the support of local community members, so he was disposed to strong community and parent involvement and committed to change. The involvement in Zavala began at a 1991 PTA meeting in which a parent angrily raised the issue of why there was such a big disparity between students' grades and their attainment on the Texas state achievement tests (TAAS—the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills). Once the facts were out on the table for teachers and parents alike to grapple with, Austin Interfaith had an opening to begin work with teachers and parents.

The work began with teachers and Austin Interfaith leaders making home visits, holding house meetings and an accountability session in the local Catholic Church, and eventually having a "walk for success." Teachers learned about issues in the community that had affected parent involvement and children's readiness for school. The successes of organizing at Zavala, well documented in Dennis Shirley's book *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*,[3] include winning a health clinic and the addition of a sixth grade Young Scientists Program aimed at increasing access of Zavala students to the nearby Kealing Middle school, which has a science magnet program.

Zavala's principal became a strong Austin Interfaith leader and brought other Austin schools into the network when he moved on. He also mentored several teachers and encouraged them to become principals. They too have brought schools into the Alliance network and are mentoring others. The intensity of Zavala's community engagement has varied over time, but through the commitment of its teachers it still has a strong collaborative and democratic culture among school staff and with parents/community members. Zavala provides insight into how a school can join the Alliance network, but there is no one route by which a school becomes affiliated. Austin's Alliance Schools also fluctuate over time in their adherence to Alliance Schools principles.

Out of 100 schools in the Austin Independent School District (AISD), the number of schools in Austin's Alliance network has grown to eighteen (as of December 2000). Most are elementary schools. There are also two middle schools and one high school. Another high school is in the "courtship" phase.

NOTES

3. Dennis Shirley, *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.

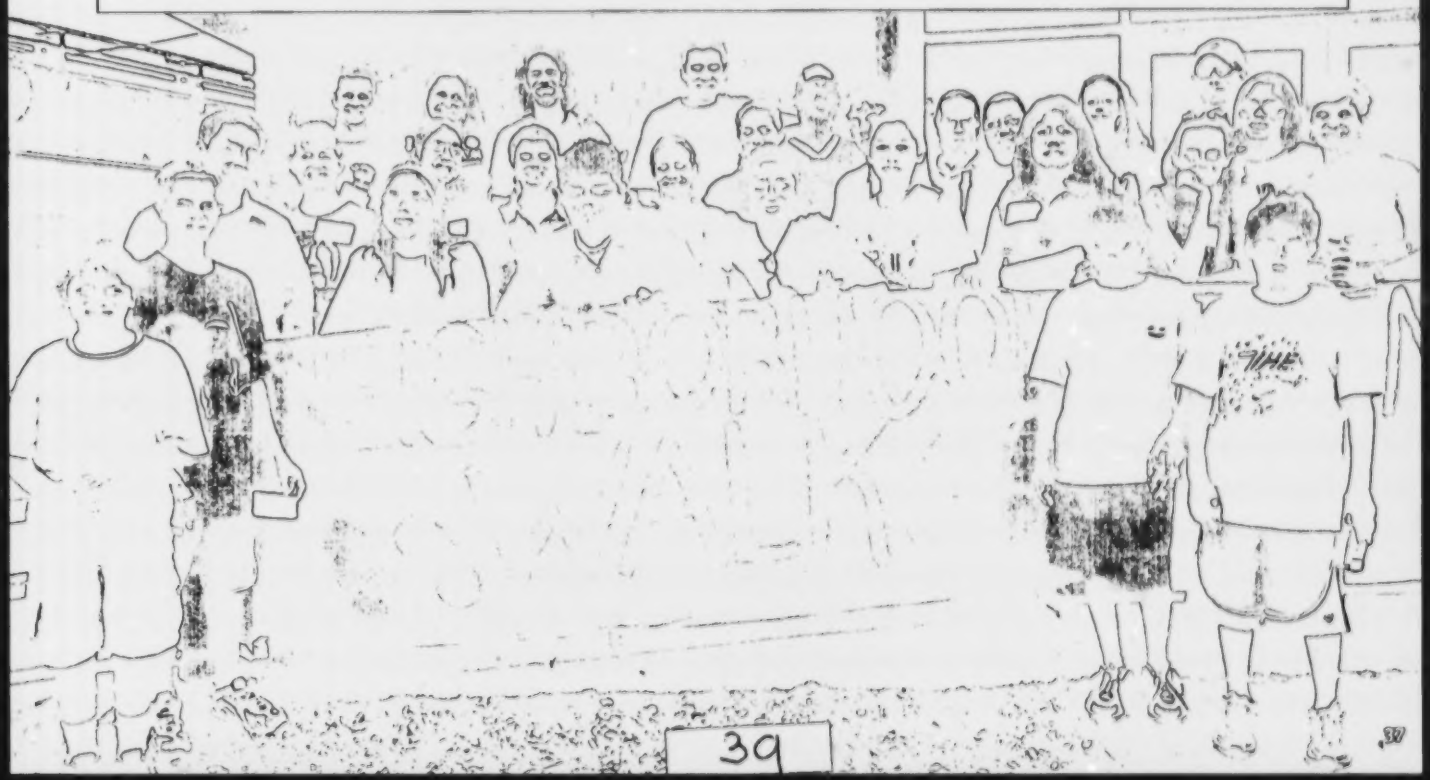
THE ORGANIZING PROCESS FOR ALLIANCE SCHOOLS

There is some variation in the way that schools enter the Alliance Schools network. Generally the process starts with one-on-one conversations between an organizer and parents, teachers, or administrators. These one-on-ones involve an exchange of views, developing relationships, and cultivating leaders. Parent leaders organize house meetings of 10-15 people who identify shared concerns that can translate into issues and a future action agenda. After an agenda is developed, parents and teachers do neighborhood walks or "walks for success" to broaden the constituency for school change.

There are at least three ways in which the work in Austin stands out as an example of a powerful Alliance Schools network with significant impact. Below we portray: 1) the strength of the network in Austin and the extent to which it is embedded in Austin Interfaith's social and human capital development work; 2) the district's recognition of the Alliance Schools as having a strong capacity for reform; and 3) the growth of leaders that sustain the Alliance Schools network in Austin.

Participants in Alliance Schools have many opportunities to interact and support each other, which has built a strong network among the Alliance Schools in Austin. First, schools and congregations, linked in "Alliance Communities," work together as neighborhood institutions to strengthen families and develop their communities. Parents and community members from across Alliance Schools form a "collective leadership" group that identifies issues that affect many schools. For example, parents in Alliance schools in Austin are concerned about the educational opportunities their children have after they leave elementary school. Alumni clubs have formed where students who have graduated from the elementary school come back in the afternoons to visit and tutor younger children. More recently, Austin Interfaith has begun working to align schools vertically, from elementary to high school.

For school staff, an Alliance Schools principals' network meets once a month. Through these meetings, principals developed a program of "parent academies"; these serve parents across a group of Alliance Schools and provide them with the information they need to be full participants in leadership and school decision-making. Alliance Schools Curriculum Specialists also meet regularly. Teachers from across Alliance Schools participate in an annual in-service day designed and run by Austin Interfaith organizers and leaders. These various forms of networking provide opportunities for parents, teachers, principals, and students to learn from each other and to support each other in their work.



AUSTIN INTERFAITH HAS MADE BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING THE ALLIANCE SCHOOLS NETWORK AN INTEGRAL PART OF ITS WORK.

Austin Interfaith has made building and strengthening the Alliance Schools network an integral part of its work, even though it is quite labor intensive. The Alliance Schools are institutional members of Austin Interfaith. A plurality of the school staff must agree in order for a school to become an Alliance school. The membership dues for schools are fixed at $750 per year. Austin Interfaith does not accept district funds for these dues, thus requiring a strong commitment from parents who must raise the institutional membership dues. Principals and teachers are participants in the same way as congregation and community members in Austin Interfaith's activities. At an action, both Alliance School teachers and congregation members plan the program, speak about issues, and make demands of candidates and officials. Schools as well as congregations commit themselves to turning out members for these actions. Austin Interfaith considers principals and teachers to be emerging leaders, as are members of other institutional affiliates. For Austin Interfaith, school issues deserve attention because they are relevant to its work in strengthening families and communities.

The Austin Independent School District's high regard for the Alliance Schools and their capacity for reform is another way in which Austin Interfaith's education organizing stands out. The new superintendent and others believe that key strengths of Alliance Schools are their depth of community and parent engagement and their having a sense of direction. As the superintendent asserted, "[An Alliance school] [*knows what it is about and where it is going*]." He is interested in seeing how the Alliance Schools would take up new initiatives that are part of his reform agenda, particularly the new Institute for Learning pilot, a teaching and learning model based on making expectations for students clear. The superintendent sees the work of Austin Interfaith as complementary to the Institute for Learning's ideas, and he has engineered meetings and joint planning between Austin Interfaith and the Institute. The district also appreciates Austin Interfaith's contribution to bringing additional resources to low-income district schools, an obligation which the district acknowledges it has yet to carry out fully. Finally, the district recognizes that the Alliance Schools represent a broad constituency and has been responsive when the organization brings issues to its attention.

A third way in which Austin Interfaith's education reform work stands out is the degree to which it has "grown" school and community leadership to sustain the initiative. Alliance Schools principals and teachers see themselves as leaders and organizers, with an obligation to identify and develop new leaders who understand Alliance Schools principles and can motivate staff and community members to participate. In Austin, the first Alliance principal was the progenitor of at least five other Alliance Schools principals and administrators and a host of teachers socialized in the Alliance Schools culture. The strength of leadership among Alliance Schools and congregational members has contributed to Austin Interfaith's ability, with just three staff members, to build a significant constituency for public education in Austin. Austin Interfaith aims toward increasing the number of schools in the network and ultimately changing the "culture" of the district as a whole.

Indicators and Measures

Austin Interfaith and the Southwest IAF Network are active in every indicator area in the framework. For example, securing state funding to support the Alliance Schools model demonstrates and builds on the organization's power. Certainly Austin Interfaith's education organizing achieves greater equity by securing resources for schools with greater needs

and providing access to high-quality programs and challenging coursework. Austin Interfaith develops social capital as organizers and leaders build relationships within and across groups, as well as through the network of institutions, churches, and schools embedded in neighborhoods.

This report, however, focuses on Austin Interfaith's work using four of the eight indicator areas: leadership development, high quality curriculum and instruction, public accountability, and school/community connection. These areas emerged as particularly salient in both the interviews we conducted and the events we observed during site visits. Archival documentation, including reports and newspaper clippings, also point to these areas of Austin Interfaith's accomplishment. Much of the work that underpins the development of an Alliance Schools network in Austin preceded what we document here. The examples we use of Austin Interfaith's work reflect the current stage of the organizing effort, which focuses on expanding the number of Alliance Schools, deepening their impact at the local school level, and extending their influence throughout the District.

This report begins with Austin Interfaith's accomplishments in developing leadership. As Austin Interfaith develops school and community stakeholders as leaders, they, in turn, identify others as potential leaders and build their awareness of power relations and skills as citizens. This process contributes to the sustainability and growth of the Alliance Schools, and builds power to secure resources and improvement for the school and community. It has also led to the personal transformation of leaders. Second, we consider accomplishments in the area of improving instruction and curriculum. We identify how Alliance Schools have raised expectations for students, opened access to magnet programs, made curriculum more sensitive and relevant to minority and non-English speaking students, furthered professional development for teachers, and piloted new teaching initiatives for the District.

In the area of public accountability, we discuss accomplishments including shared accountability for student achievement, a commitment to open communication among school staff and between school staff and parents, public officials' responsiveness to Alliance Schools' and the community's agenda, and increased political and civic participation. Finally, we look at the accomplishments of the Alliance Schools in connecting the school and the community. Through the Alliance Schools work, schools are becoming resources for the community, teachers are also seeing parents and the community as resources, schools are becoming more welcoming to parents/community, and parents/community members are taking on new substantive roles in schools.

First Indicator Area: Leadership Development

"[I define my role as] a leader. I had never considered myself a leader before. ...Now I work as a parent liaison. This is what I want to do. Teach parents that they are leaders, that they have a right to ask questions, get the information. I see myself in every one of those parents." SCHOOL-BASED PARENT LIAISON WHO HAD BEEN A PARENT LEADER AT ZAVALA

In the IAF/Austin Interfaith model of what it means to be an Alliance School, the principal and teachers, as well as parents and community members, become leaders whose responsibility it is to identify and develop leadership in others. Developing leaders means building their capacity to take the lead in making demands, negotiating, and carrying out school improvement efforts. One strategy is to educate parents about curriculum, school policy, budgets, and the political context and provide opportunities for them to take on active roles using that information. Leadership development entails a strategic assessment of the potential of parents, congregants, and teachers as leaders, along with sensitivity to their motivations and how they analyze situations.

Not everyone plays the same kind of leadership role in Austin Interfaith's work or in the context of a school. IAF/Austin Interfaith categorize leadership roles as primary, secondary, or tertiary. Primary leaders have the broadest overview of Austin Interfaith's work and a strategic understanding of building a powerful organization. They are the ones who guide strategy and have the capacity to develop others as leaders. Secondary leaders are those who take responsibility for particular campaigns, meet with public officials, and often are on the front lines. Tertiary leaders are most important to move an issue forward.

They commit to getting turnout for an action or rally and always serve on the front lines. All three types of leaders are important in a campaign or action and individuals may move back and forth between the different kinds of leadership roles.

There are four ways in which Austin Interfaith's accomplishments in leadership development can be measured. First is the *growth in the number of schools in the network and deepening of the work in those schools.* Second is the *sustainability of the IAF vision in Alliance Schools.* A third is *bringing attention, resources, and improvements to the schools* and the community. Finally, Austin Interfaith's work in leadership development can be measured in terms of the *personal growth and transformation of leaders.*

Increasing the Size of the Alliance Schools Network and the Strength of Alliance Schools Culture

As increasing numbers of parents, teachers, and administrators become leaders and move across schools, they bring their enthusiasm and understanding to new settings, increasing the size of the network and deepening the commitment of schools to Alliance principles. During the period of our research, three new schools came into the network and two more were considering joining. There is a growing recognition of the need to move Alliance Schools membership up the grade levels, in response to parents' concerns about the quality of their children's education after elementary school.

Ridgetop Elementary School and T.A. Brown Elementary are good examples of how "growing" leadership extends the reach of the Alliance Schools in Austin. The principals of both schools had been teachers at Zavala when its principal first began working with Austin Interfaith. Both moved into principalships at schools that were not already in the Alliance network, but they soon brought their schools in. The two principals explained their motivations for bringing their schools into the Alliance Schools network in similar ways. Soon after taking their new positions, they realized the importance of the kind of community engagement there was at Zavala. *"I realized that the school could not do it alone."*

The T.A. Brown principal was excited to inherit a "Blue Ribbon School," but she soon learned that the honor was a shallow one. *"T.A. Brown was known as a welcoming school, but parents did not know what a blue ribbon school was. The work had been done by the principal and a few teachers."* She valued the inclusive culture of an Alliance school, noting that having parents and community members involved keeps her in touch with broader concerns. *"If they weren't involved, I would get lost in the day to day issues."* Both Ridgetop and T.A. Brown are models of what can happen when the principal understands deeply and is strongly committed to the collaborative and inclusive culture of an Alliance School. Both principals have invested in extensive parent and teacher training, carried out and encouraged public conversation, and shaped a staff strongly committed to authentic community engagement.

When the principal who was at Zavala went on to the principalship of a middle school, he continued to push forward promising leaders. The current principal of Brooke School, which became an Alliance School after she came, remembered her own mentoring at Webb Middle School.

"I loved being a curriculum specialist, working with teachers and students. And one day he (the former Zavala principal) [brought up] the Brooke interview and said, 'I think you need to go do that.' I said, "No, I'm happy here," but he said, 'Fly little bird, fly.' He sent me out there and here I am. He is my mentor and he mentors a lot of principals. He raised us in that collaborative culture and we know that it works. And my job here is to find other people who will be leaders and help them grow to be twice as many Alliance Schools, and that culture becomes not just a school culture but a community culture and eventually an AISD [Austin Independent School District] culture. And I think that the Alliance Schools are changing the culture of AISD."

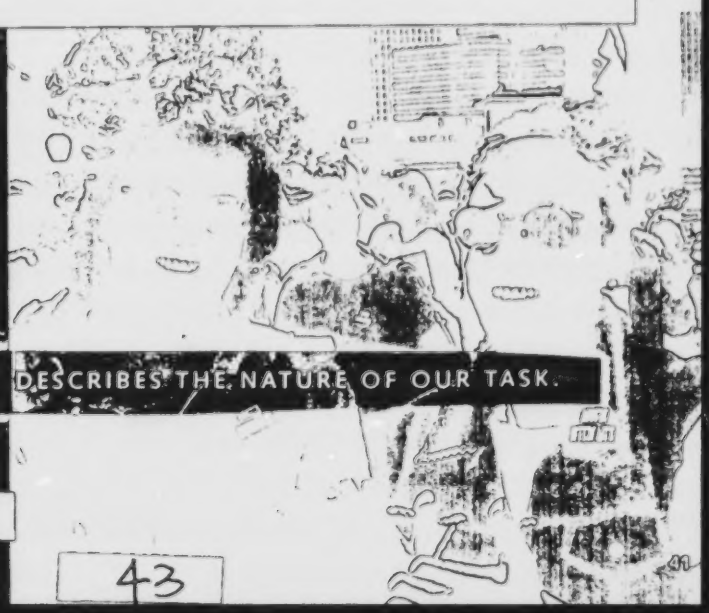
Sustainability of the IAF Vision in Alliance Schools

A range of those we interviewed emphasized the role of leadership in the sustainability of the Alliance Schools vision. Joining the Alliance Schools network is only the first step in an ongoing process of change and reflection for schools. The intensity of commitment to the Alliance vision fluctuates over time at any site. The IAF refrain, "all organizing is reorganizing" effectively describes the ongoing nature of the task, and the hard work and persistence that it takes to change a school's culture and to sustain the new culture. School staff and parents are continually learning how best to realize the Alliance Schools principles in their school. Both time and turnover of staff and parent leaders affect the intensity of commitment. Innovations and relationships become routine and require renewal or overhaul. The depth of leadership and its spread across Alliance Schools and in member congregations has provided a strong base for the ongoing process of "reorganizing."

While there are several possible entry points for a school to become involved as an Alliance School, principal leadership is key. The principal must be open to working collaboratively and to being a model for his/her staff and community. At the same time, organizers and principals alike recognize the danger of relying on a particular individual to sustain a reform effort. With this in mind, during one-on-ones, house meetings, and neighborhood walks, principals look for potential leaders among teachers and parents and cultivate them in various ways. They send teacher leaders to IAF training and position them on school leadership teams, persuade promising teacher leaders to move into administrative positions in other schools, as in the examples above, and encourage parent leaders to take positions as parent liaisons or after-school program coordinators.

Zavala provides evidence of how leadership development sustains the reform effort. As the first Alliance school in Austin, community engagement varied in intensity over time, and teachers recognized that the "relational culture" that made the professional environment of Zavala so satisfying was vulnerable if taken for granted. A core group of teachers recognized the importance of the principal in maintaining the culture, and worked to participate in principal appointments and to assure that new principals would become socialized in the Zavala/Alliance Schools environment.

The Zavala teachers were mostly successful in getting their preferred candidates until one recent appointment. The young principal assigned to Zavala in 1999 had never been in an Alliance school, but the faculty was determined to "socialize" her. As a long-term teacher at Zavala told us, "We talked as a faculty and said, if she doesn't live up to the Zavala tradition, we'll give her one year." In this case, the teachers took it on themselves to nurture the new principal in the ways of leadership in an Alliance School. In December 2000, after she had been at Zavala for about a year, the new principal was already participating in parent academy training and Austin Interfaith organizers saw her as a promising leader. When we visited in spring 2000, she was strategizing about how to get new parents involved at Zavala.



"ALL ORGANIZING IS REORGANIZING" DESCRIBES THE NATURE OF OUR TASK.

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Bringing Attention and Resources to Schools

Parents, school staff, and community members gain political "literacy" as they engage in public actions and "get out the vote" campaigns, write bond issues and legislation, make demands of elected officials, and participate in training. As a result, they have been leaders in winning resources and policy changes that benefit their schools. The Investment Capital Fund makes funds available to any school in Texas that commits to engaging parents with school staff in learning and innovation. The amount available has increased incrementally from an original $2 million in 1993 to $14 million in 1999. The goal for 2001 was $20 million. With the growth of the Fund, there has been an increase in the amount of money any one school can obtain. In addition, Austin Interfaith and Alliance Schools leaders have brought pressure on City Council and the School District to commit millions of dollars for playground renovation and after-school programs in schools and in neighborhoods that otherwise would have been passed by.

Most of the schools we visited had recruited a strong parent leader to assume the role of "parent liaison," a position funded through "Account for Learning" funds (a program to compensate low-income schools after busing ended). In many places in Austin, the parent liaison acts as a social worker, calling parents when their children are absent from school or finding social services for children in need. In Alliance Schools, the liaisons see their role as developing leaders, raising community awareness of the political environment, and encouraging parents to participate in actions/accountability sessions, vote, and get others to vote. School staff recognize that having strong community leaders creates the political will for reform—community support that allows schools to take on issues they would not be able to address by themselves. In this way, Alliance Schools parents increase the power of schools and school administrators. As one parent liaison told us, "Life is political; you have to learn how to work the system." Another explained his role as,

"getting the parents more involved in the political scene. Because indirectly, it is them and how much resources they are going to get for the school if they are out there voting and the candidates they support that are getting elected. That is one thing that has happened to me since I've been involved in Austin Interfaith, that I've become much more aware politically and about the balance of power in Austin."

Personal Growth of Leaders and Their Increased Sense of Efficacy

Developing leadership is a pervasive theme in the way in which participants in Alliance Schools talk about their work. Parents speak of developing other parents as leaders, and they also then become role models for other parents and for their own children. We heard several stories of how children become more engaged in school and even take on leadership roles among youth in their congregations because they are inspired when they see their parents in the schools and in leadership positions. When Alliance Schools participants talk about becoming leaders, they tell stories about their personal development and learning, how they gained confidence and courage, increased their political awareness, and recognized their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Their stories are about the opportunities they had to test themselves as leaders, usually a tale of being pushed forward, with support, to speak in front of a group, lobby a public official, or take a position of responsibility. The Brooke Principal's story of being told, "Fly little bird" is one example of personal transformation. Several parents and teachers told us about their growing sense of personal power and ability to bring about change as a result of the roles they have played as Austin Interfaith and Alliance Schools leaders. Parents and community members also gain knowledge—about curriculum and pedagogy, how schools and the School District are organized, and about the political arena—that increases their confidence, capacity, and credibility as they work to improve schools.

Profile of T.A. Vasquez, Former Zavala Parent and Austin Interfaith Leader

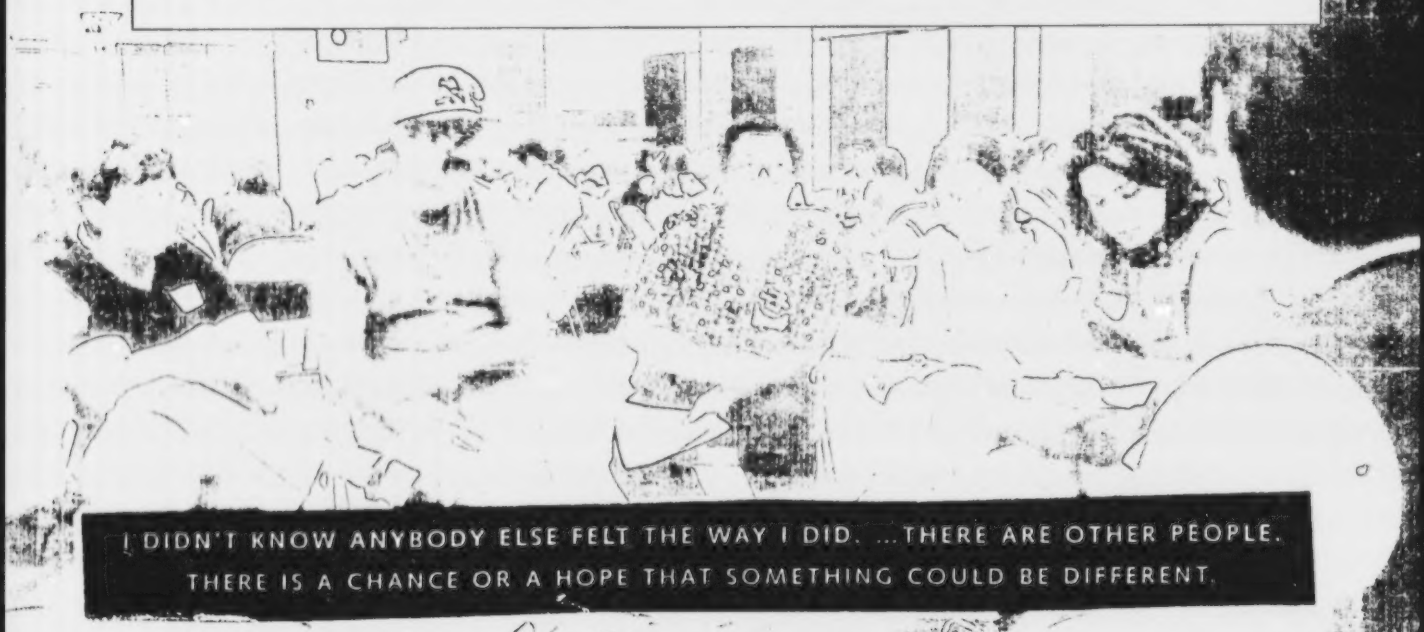
"I think it's been nine years now that...I was the parent of four kids at Zavala. And my involvement in the schools at that time was coming to some PTA meetings...parent conferences, helping whenever I got the chance...but not really [feeling] *like I had any business knowing anything else about the schools or... knowing about the teachers personally. And if at any point I ever disagreed with the teacher, I kept it to myself. I didn't feel it was my place because* [they] *were teachers, and they've had more schooling than me. ...I felt that everything was fine.*

"One day, I had someone call me up and introduce herself...and she said, 'I'm an organizer with Austin Interfaith.' At that time, I had no idea who Austin Interfaith was, I had never had an affiliation with any kind of organization other than the PTA. ...I asked her, 'Where did you get my name?'...and she said, 'Well, we're looking at working with your school. And we spoke to the principal, spoke to the teachers, and they mentioned your name. They said that you come and visit, and they see that you are interested and work with your kids.'" The organizer asked her questions about herself, how she saw the school and the community. *"And to myself I'm thinking, 'Man, these are questions no one has ever asked me before.' I never had any one ask me questions about how I felt or how I saw things. She really wanted to know how I felt.'"*

Eventually, Ms. Vasquez came to a house meeting, with several other parents. *"And I'm making my comments and hearing other people making their comments and I thought, 'Wow, I didn't know anybody else felt the way I did.' When I'm by myself, I'm thinking I really can't do anything about it, but then slowly realized, 'I'm not the only one thinking this way. There are other people. There is a chance or a hope that something could be different.'*

"One night at a PTA meeting...one of the parents read out the TAAS scores. I didn't even know what TAAS scores were. I didn't know how significant the scores were. [The test scores showed] *we were really in bad shape, even though my kids are getting A's and B's. So I am thinking, 'There is something wrong with this picture.'... My focus was really small; it was like I had blinders on. I had just concentrated on my own kids...but eventually it came to the point where I started questioning the school itself and the teachers. I started thinking, 'Okay, why is my daughter going to middle school, and she is not being recommended to be in honors classes?'*

"I was kind of scared, because I had ...always been this person kind of looking through the window, kind of wanting to be a part of this kind of thing, but scared because...I haven't gotten my degree. I don't want to show how scared I am." Ms. Vasquez tells about the painstaking process of gaining the knowledge and confidence to confront those in power. She was one of the parents who participated directly in the battle to get a health clinic at Zavala, and in this role organized other parents and sat at the table with city officials. In preparation, Austin Interfaith organizers helped her interpret data and articulate demands.


I DIDN'T KNOW ANYBODY ELSE FELT THE WAY I DID. ...THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE. THERE IS A CHANCE OR A HOPE THAT SOMETHING COULD BE DIFFERENT.

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"And they'd come over to my house. ...'We're going to go over some numbers'...and we'd be sitting there, sometimes till 11:30 at night going over stuff, working to understand what's going on. This is what this chart means. This is important. Working to put together what I wanted to say in words. ...[The Austin Interfaith organizer] *was very patient with me and helped me to organize my thoughts into words that would really make a good impression. ...And at that time I was real self-conscious... because in meetings with school board members and state legislators... they are dressed to the teeth. And for me to feel like I'm capable of sitting at the same table with them and discuss what's going on here? But it was like, what made me feel like I could do that? I have found an organization that makes me feel important, that looks at me like a person.*

Noting that others had seen leadership potential in her, she said, *"I guess maybe it was in there all the time. ...And, you know, I was scared. Nobody was really there to push me or encourage me."* Ms. Vasquez eventually became director of Zavala's after-school program and served as its community liaison. When we interviewed her, she was just starting as community liaison at Johnson High School.

"I've been part of this organization for nine years. I still learn something new every day. I guess what keeps me going is being a part of this [community organizing], *seeing how it works. ...And every time I'm part of these groups, I'm giving real pieces of what I know. ...These people that come to these tables are all executives, they have knowledge. ...But I say, 'Where's the community?' And I always bring a piece of the Zavala story with me. 'You know, if you really want to make change, you really have to get with the people.' And I'll tell them, 'let's do some house meetings.' And I actually go to a house meeting with them. ...The organization* [Austin Interfaith], *they take me to school. I don't have a degree, but I've been going to school all this time. I've learned new approaches to curriculum. ...I've met wonderful people with a wealth of knowledge, and here I am... this little person from East Austin. How many people have the opportunities to learn from these people that ordinarily you have to go to college to be near? I wouldn't have. I even got to go to Harvard* [to speak and participate in a seminar]. *So the organization has shared and given me a lot."* RESEARCH FOR ACTION INTERVIEW

Second Indicator: High Quality Curriculum and Instruction

A school culture that encourages "conversation" creates the conditions for high quality curriculum and instruction by encouraging reflection on classroom practice, clarifying and raising both teacher and parent expectations for student learning, and drawing attention to the quality and appropriateness of curriculum. Several Alliance Schools accomplishments provide evidence of success in this area, including: *raised expectations for student learning, policies and curriculum that are more sensitive to and appropriate for minority and non-English speaking students, increased opportunities for professional development, and introduction of new teaching initiatives to meet students' needs.*

Raised Expectations for Student Learning

When parents and community members participate in the conversation about schools and children's experiences, they have a clearer picture of what is happening in the classroom and what their children's grades really mean. As a result, they are more likely to hold schools accountable for enabling their children to compete with the strongest students from the best schools in the system. Dennis Shirley's detailed case study of Zavala in *Community Organizing for School Reform* describes how increased collaboration between parents and teachers led to school staff holding higher expectations for children's achievement. *"Parental interest led the teachers to re-examine their instructional styles and curricula and to develop new attitudes and techniques to teach their students better.* '[As one teacher remarked], *we've gotten away from the stereotypical idea of minority children which*

led many of us to water down the curriculum.'"[4] He provides several examples of how parents' and community members' increased interest, as well as dialogue between school staff and parents, led to changes in curriculum and classroom practices. The results of these efforts can be seen in rising test scores, increased parent satisfaction, higher attendance rates, and lower teacher turnover.

One strategy that illustrates both the nature of the effort to raise expectations and the kinds of results that can accrue for children and communities is The Young Scientists Program, developed as a result of Zavala's efforts to raise expectations and achievement levels for all of its students and, at the same time, to increase access to magnet and honors programs at the middle and high school levels.

One concern of Zavala parents that always surfaced was how few of their children were accepted to the prestigious science magnet program at Kealing Middle School, only a few blocks away. Before The Young Scientists Program, only one Zavala student had ever been admitted to Kealing's program. When the Zavala principal learned about a National Science Foundation-supported research project at the University of Texas that required a community outreach component, he saw the potential for developing a program that would prepare Zavala students to compete for entrance to Kealing's magnet program. The collaboration between the University and members of the Zavala school community led to The Young Scientists Program, which adds a sixth grade that accepts students on a competitive basis. To supplement the NSF funds, Zavala parents put pressure on the district for additional support, and Alliance Schools leaders since have obtained support to replicate the program in three additional schools.

It should be noted that Young Scientists was one of several efforts that teachers and parents at Zavala implemented, motivated by their belief that it was necessary to raise expectations for students. Zavala teachers realized that they were not challenging students enough, were not using the kind of curriculum they would have used use for middle class students in other schools. They raised their expectations, used different curriculum and teaching practices, and test scores went up. Teachers continued to monitor progress over time; The Young Scientists Program contributed to teachers' extended process of reflection on the success of their efforts to raise student achievement.

The Young Scientists Program has been replicated in three other Alliance Schools. It has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of students admitted to Kealing's magnet program from the schools that have adopted it. Since the program began in the early 1990s, the proportion of students from Eastside schools who go on to Kealing has increased from one in ten to one in four, and this has changed the demographic composition of the magnet program significantly.

A potential critique of The Young Scientists Program is that it supports tracking. Austin Interfaith and Alliance Schools, however, point to the benefits for the broader student population. The parents who worked to develop and win resources to bring Young Scientists to their schools are working not just for their own children, but also setting a precedent for changes to ensure that more of Austin's low-income children have a chance to get into honors and magnet programs and have greater opportunity for social mobility. In addition, both teachers and parents point to the ways in which having a competitive sixth grade program at their schools raises the quality of instruction and curricular challenge at the lower grades. All of the teachers in the school have a strong incentive to challenge their students academically in order to position them to qualify for The Young Scientists Program.

Though there are likely a number of contributing factors in addition to The Young Scientists Program, standardized test scores at Alliance Schools have gone up since the early 1990s. In the most recent report of the results of the TAAS, Zavala achieved the status of "recognized," one notch below the highest rating of exemplary. The percentage of students scoring at high levels at other Alliance Schools has also gone up, with Brooke and Maplewood among the twenty-four schools that achieved "recognized" status in the 2001 report.

Policies and Curriculum That Are More Sensitive to and Appropriate for Minority and Non-English Speaking Students

Working toward effective bilingual policies and programs for the Austin public schools has been one focus of Austin Interfaith's education organizing at both the individual school and citywide levels. Despite the fact that 47 percent of the students in the Austin

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4. Shirley, 1997, p. 160.

Independent School District are Hispanic and the number of Asian students is growing, the district has lacked a consistent policy on bilingual education. In addition, schools with high percentages of Spanish-speaking students lacked books and materials in Spanish and sufficient qualified bilingual teachers.

Austin Interfaith efforts in the last few years grew out of a concern about bilingual education at one particular Alliance school. The principal and teachers at T.A. Brown Elementary were frustrated by District reluctance to assign students to bilingual classes. More than half of T.A. Brown's students (56 percent) speak only Spanish, yet the school did not receive the staff and materials necessary to provide an appropriate program. The principal encouraged teachers to hold a series of meetings with parents to alert them to this dilemma. The parents were surprised to learn that their children were not receiving needed instruction and shared the teachers' anger. Together they identified a set of demands, carried out research about the status of bilingual education in the District, and held house meetings to build a broader constituency. In the process, parents and teachers defined their vision for bilingual education at their school.

Realizing that they could only achieve their school's goals for bilingual education by changing policy at the District level, T.A. Brown staff and parents expanded their effort into a district-wide campaign. They held a series of open forums that included other Alliance Schools with similar populations, which directed public attention toward the issue of bilingual education. As a result of their efforts, the District's Deputy Superintendent for Bilingual Education agreed to meet with them and even visited T.A. Brown. After a series of meetings in which parents presented their research, the Deputy Superintendent immediately bypassed red tape that limited book purchases, and in fall 2000 laid out a vision for bilingual education that reflected his discussions with the parents and teachers.

Evidence of the success of this campaign includes the purchase of bilingual materials and the institution of a bilingual education policy that addresses community concerns. In a public accountability session in spring 2000, School Board candidates publicly committed to working with Austin Interfaith to carry out the district's new bilingual education policies. Extensive newspaper coverage the next day brought wider attention to Austin Interfaith's bilingual education agenda and to the candidates' promises, contributing to public accountability. Future measures of impact will be the addition of bilingual teachers and appropriate materials in all Austin schools with significant non-English speaking populations.

Increased Professional Development for Teachers

For the past three years, the Alliance Schools have designed and led their own in-service program on the day that the district sets aside for district-wide in-service. The Alliance program is planned and led by Austin Interfaith organizers and the staff and parent leaders from Austin's Alliance Schools. Inclusion of the Alliance Schools program among the choices open to teachers is evidence that the district recognizes the high quality of teaching and organizational practice in Alliance Schools. Since school staff members have the opportunity to choose particular sessions on the in-service day, the level of attendance at the Alliance Schools program is one measure of teachers' views on the quality of the program, as well as the strength and reach of the initiative. Attendance has been consistently high; there were an estimated 800-900 teachers at the first in-service day, and in January 2001 there were over 1,000 teachers and staff members attending the Alliance Schools program.

In addition to these in-service programs, schools can support training through the Investment Capital Fund from the Texas Education Agency. Participants in Alliance Schools often attend training that involves parents and teachers together. Some examples of such joint training include: Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) five-day or ten-day conferences; training related to new curriculum; and collaborative sessions at the school level to develop or improve programs. Overall, these discussions encourage teachers and parents to reflect on the school setting from a variety of perspectives and see things in new ways. It is not uncommon to hear teachers and parents talk about their experiences in these training opportunities as transformative. The Southwest IAF often brings in distinguished education researchers and social scientists to talk about their work and its implications for Alliance Schools. It is not unusual for organizers and parents to refer to the ideas of a scholar whose work they have read or discussed with the author.

Introduction of New Teaching Initiatives to Meet Students' Needs: the Institute for Learning

In his first year, Austin's current superintendent introduced an experimental pilot program, University of Pittsburgh Professor Lauren Resnick's Institute for Learning (IFL), as a strategy for improving students' academic performance. This approach, a "teaching and learning model," stresses the importance of teachers being absolutely clear about their expectations for students' achievement. The IFL refers to the kind of conversation that would occur between teachers and students in an ideal classroom as "accountable talk." A public demonstration of Institute for Learning practice is known as a "learning walk," in which standards and work are made visible and students have an opportunity to explain what they learned and how.

For several reasons, Austin Interfaith and the Alliance Schools have been in the forefront of implementing IFL in the Austin Independent School District. For one thing, Austin Interfaith recognizes that it shares many of IFL's values, including the importance of maintaining public accountability and developing a school culture characterized by openness about expectations and teaching practices. In addition, the Austin superintendent has confidence in the capacity of Alliance Schools to implement a sophisticated teaching and learning innovation like IFL. The superintendent's eventual goal is to implement the IFL approach district-wide, and he wants to build some support for the program within the district first, so that school staff members won't reject it as, in his words, the "reform du jour." In his view, Alliance Schools offer a good place to start because of their collaborative school culture and community engagement, and he hopes to learn from the pilot implementation there.

The superintendent characterizes his current relationship with Austin Interfaith as a "courtship," and that metaphor might extend to his role as a matchmaker between the Institute for Learning and Austin Interfaith/Alliance Schools. IAF and Austin Interfaith are interested in the Institute's approach to classroom practice not only because they see compatibility with their values, but also because they see IFL as having the potential to stimulate thinking about how the IAF vision for Alliance Schools can penetrate the culture of the classroom itself. This exploration is in process; Alliance Schools' teachers and parents have attended training and visited the Pittsburgh headquarters of the Institute for Learning. The superintendent sees IAF/Alliance School's capacity for engaging parents as bringing an element missing from the Institute for Learning model. It will be important to track how the marriage of these two organizations transforms each and contributes to student learning.

Third Indicator Area: Public Accountability

"You have to be relational, it is hard to really understand... We're not used to thinking of ourselves...as stakeholders of the school in the community. This is not a concept...there's not a word in our vocabulary. That you have the right to hold teachers or those in office accountable." ALLIANCE SCHOOLS PARENT

Austin Interfaith organizers and leaders stress the public nature of the relationships involved in collaboration at all levels in Alliance Schools. In a public relationship, parties make a commitment both to support each other and to hold each other accountable for follow-through. Public relationships broaden accountability, and make it collective. The most experienced leaders think of themselves as accountable for the well-being of the larger community. Measures of public accountability in Austin Interfaith's work include: *open communication between parents and teachers* about their struggles and expectations; a commitment to *open communication by school staff*, both among themselves and with students; *support of public officials for the Alliance Schools Initiative* and responsiveness to a parent and community agenda; and *increased political and civic participation.*

Open Communication Between Parents and Teachers About Their Struggles and Expectations

Through the processes of organizing and becoming an Alliance School, both parents and teachers make public their expectations and the struggle to reach them. The story of Zavala reveals the transformative effect of disclosing expectations in a public conversation. Parents looked much more deeply into the educational business of Zavala and became much more engaged, while teachers confronted their own inconsistencies and low expectations for the children. Significant advances like the development of the Young Scientists Program and generally improved curriculum and teaching at all grade levels only came about as a result of parents' asking questions and teachers revealing their dilemmas about their classroom practices and methods of assessing students' achievement. It took the joint effort of parents and school staff to come up with both the pedagogical ideas and the power to obtain resources and waivers necessary to implement a program like Young Scientists.

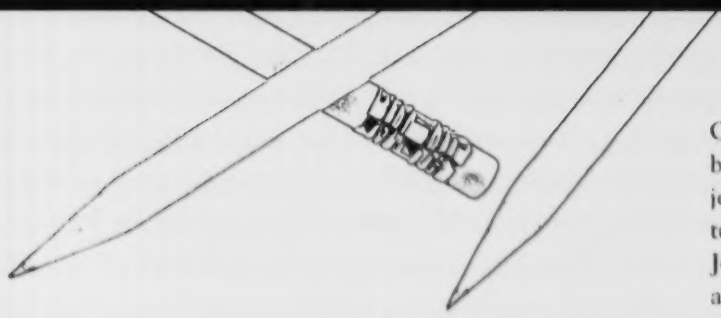
The bilingual education campaign at T.A. Brown is another example of how teachers and parents have come together when expectations and struggles were discussed publicly. In this case, teachers brought parents information about the inadequacy of services for non-English speaking students, which spurred parents to join them in further research and action. These steps made it possible to bring the conversation to the district level, which enabled a resolution that had wide impact. It was the strength of teachers and parents working jointly that led the district to review its policies and clear bureaucratic obstacles to hiring new bilingual teachers and purchasing appropriate materials. In this case, parents' and community members' awareness and the joint effort with school staff created the political will for action.

We heard many examples of parents and teachers talking about and clarifying expectations. At Sunset Valley, parents told us about their efforts to clarify for themselves what they can expect of teachers and of their children's work. Several Alliance Schools instituted Math and Literacy Nights and encouraged parents to attend. At Brooke, for example, more than 150 parents showed up for each night. The principal of Ridgetop Elementary School told us, "I want parents to hold me (and other principals) responsible and ask me how do I measure their child's success?" She has modeled this to her staff, and the everyday life of the school offers several examples of public accountability. For one thing, teachers use elements of the organizing process in their interactions with parents. One teacher told us that she met with parents first one-on-one and eventually as a group, in order to learn about their expectations of her. In turn, she shared her expectations in asking them to be learning coaches for their children.

A Commitment to Open Communication by School Staff

Public accountability is implicit in the "relational culture" that Alliance Schools strive for. In the everyday life of a school, public accountability shows when professional staff have open communication with each other as well as with parents and community members. This openness is in direct contrast with the typical school culture. So little communication exists among teachers in most public schools that researchers have used terms like "privatization of practice" and the "egg crate model" to characterize the professional environment. In keeping with the principle of public accountability, the goals of teachers within Alliance Schools and principals across schools is to share information honestly about their own settings.

The Ridgetop principal described changes at her school that convinced her teachers were becoming more open about their classroom practice, seeking and offering support.



"Kindergarten teachers were talking to the first grade teachers and asking what they could do to help each other. Before that there was competition between them, competition between principals for test scores, all for test scores. Now people are getting the message that they have to help each other out so they can all do well."

The Ridgetop principal's strategy for hiring teachers is another example of how the expectation of public accountability within the school's professional staff is made visible. She told us that when she makes an offer to a new teacher, she always invites a staff member to be with her in the office and asks the candidate, "Are you willing to do the work? Because we will all hold you accountable. If you say, right now, on speakerphone, 'I accept your offer, and I'm willing to do the work,' I'll say, "We will hold you accountable because we don't want you to just say it because you want a job."

This kind of openness and public accountability among the professional staff of schools is what makes the Institute for Learning's work such a comfortable fit with the Alliance Schools culture. The "learning walk" parallels the Alliance Schools' neighborhood walk; both build public accountability and establish a relational culture. In our visit to a school which was piloting the IFL approach, we went on a "learning walk" in which we observed work hanging on the wall outside each classroom. Teachers invited students to come out of the classroom to explain and assess their work in light of their interpretation of the expectations. Inside the classrooms, students directed visitors' attention to the poster paper above each workstation where the expectations, which the students had memorized, were written out in clear block letters. The learning walk exposes what is usually private to public consideration and thereby to finding common understanding and solutions to problems.

Overall, the creation of a "relational culture," which builds public accountability, has the effect of creating joint ownership for student and school success among teachers and between the school and its community. Joint ownership makes use of the full range of available talent and ingenuity in working towards student success, and makes it possible to sustain reform efforts. By opening up classroom practice, the relational culture of Alliance Schools sets the stage for improvements in teaching and learning.

As noted earlier, there are multiple networks associated with Alliance Schools—networks of principals, curriculum specialists, parent leaders, networks across school levels, groups of students in alumni clubs, and participants in conferences across Alliance Schools. These networks provide broad-based support for raising issues and solving problems that Alliance Schools have in common but that an individual school cannot take on itself. The networks also include connections with congregations in Austin, mostly in the same neighborhood as the school, but not always. Often school improvement efforts originate from the concerns of congregations, which are rooted in their communities and see schools as a linchpin for community improvement.

Public Officials Support the Alliance Schools Initiative and Respond to Parent and Community Agenda

Through the processes of house meetings, carrying out research, meetings with public officials, and holding public accountability sessions or forums, Alliance Schools broaden their conversation to include public officials among the stakeholders entering into accountable relationships concerning public schools. We saw evidence that Austin Interfaith and the Alliance Schools were able to get city and school officials to follow through on their responsibilities. The Southwest IAF, with participation from Austin Interfaith, has succeeded in maintaining and increasing the funds available from the Texas Education Agency for schools to engage parents in reform, even when there were threats to cut the funds or eliminate them altogether. In addition, the Austin City Council has allocated funds for and supported playground renovation and after-school programs.

Austin Interfaith and Alliance Schools have also been successful in getting the district to acknowledge needs and follow through on many of its commitments

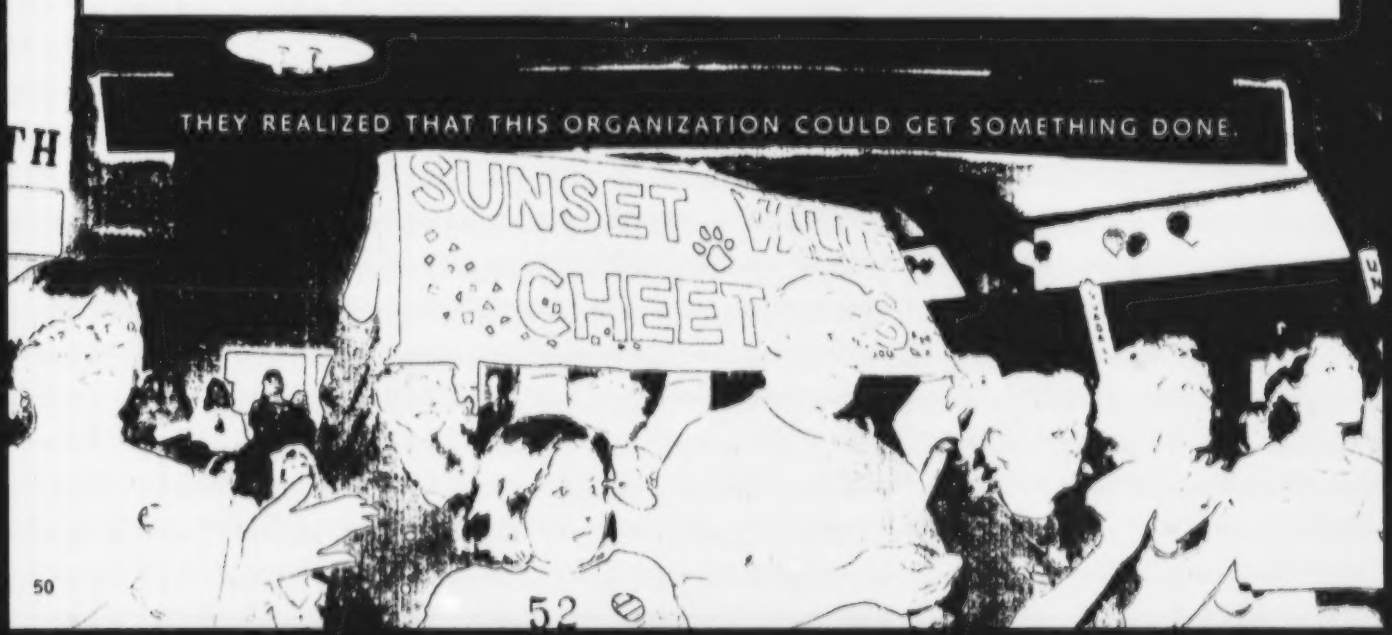
regarding bilingual education. The District still must hire more bilingual teachers, a commitment Austin Interfaith asked of School Board candidates in a spring 2000 accountability session. When parents at Zavala began to ask what the district was going to do to make up for construction mistakes at the school that cut needed space from new classrooms, the superintendent himself came to a meeting and promised to compensate with additional funding. These examples illustrate how Austin Interfaith has succeeded in holding public officials accountable for improving Austin's public schools.

Increased Political and Civic Participation

Strategies that result in public accountability necessarily serve to engage community members, parents, and school staff in the political arena, thereby building their skills in civic participation and raising their awareness of how to leverage power. During the late 1980s, organizing around school bond issues not only served as a civics lesson but also served to energize Austin Interfaith members for the long-term work of increasing educational equity and improving school programs. They successfully organized the vote against a proposed school bond that would have directed funds primarily to schools that were already well resourced. Two years later, when the School Board presented a new bond issue that directed more school construction funds to low-income schools, Austin Interfaith members worked for passage and the bond passed. As one Austin Interfaith leader told us, *"That was a turning point. They* [members] *realized that this organization could get something done."*

Engagement with public officials at the state, city, and school district levels is a central strategy in many of Austin Interfaith and Alliance Schools campaigns to address pressing issues. Austin Interfaith invites officials to accountability sessions in which they are asked to declare publicly their positions on a set of Austin Interfaith's demands. Each public accountability session is preceded by a meeting with each official where leaders present the agenda in advance. This gives public officials a chance to discuss different perspectives and develop their positions through dialogue.

The power of the vote is an underlying theme of accountability sessions. Community power derives from public officials' recognition that Austin Interfaith members will exert their voting power if necessary to hold them accountable for commitments made in public. At the time of the session we observed in the spring of 2000, Austin Interfaith was planning a "get-out-the-vote" campaign for a day that the city had designated specifically for the organization's members to vote for public candidates. A large voter turnout would demonstrate to the public officials that indeed Austin Interfaith had the political clout to impact a candidate's chance of election and to hold elected officials to their commitments over the long haul. These strategies for creating accountable relationships with elected officials and high-ranking school district administrators educate community members in how the political system can work for them, and stimulate their civic participation. A public relationship with elected and school district officials entails holding them accountable and brings with it a necessary measure of tension.



Fourth Indicator Area: School/Community Connection

The discussion of public accountability above outlines the complexity of relationships established through community organizing. These relationships include openness and trust, but they also entail holding parties accountable through the underlying recognition that each has power by virtue either of position or ability to speak for large numbers. One of the best known images of community organizing is large turnout at public actions, leading many to see community organizing groups as confrontational. In actuality, relationships between schools and community organizing groups are usually more nuanced and represent varying forms of school/community connection.

In the case of Austin Interfaith, the relationship between school and community is especially close by virtue of the relationship of the schools to Austin Interfaith itself. Alliance Schools become institutional members of Austin Interfaith, with the result that teachers, parents, administrators, and community members are potential Austin Interfaith leaders. This means that teachers or administrators, as well as parents and community members, may initiate efforts to strengthen community engagement or gain support for a school improvement effort. The Austin superintendent and other external partners clearly recognize this strong community engagement as a distinctive feature of Alliance Schools and acknowledge that Austin Interfaith has much to teach others about how to bring about such engagement.

Some of the measures of Alliance Schools' success in weaving school and community together include: *schools become resources to the community; teachers see parents and the community as resources; parents see schools as welcoming and open to their input;* and *parents take on meaningful new roles in schools.*

Schools Become Resources to the Community

"Schools are embedded in the work of Austin Interfaith and it has been good for the organization as well as good for the schools. Schools cannot be concerned with what happens just inside their buildings. Job training and ESL classes, these aren't traditional things for schools to get involved in, but it is a natural thing for them to get into." AUSTIN INTERFAITH ORGANIZER

As noted earlier in this report, Austin Interfaith's organizing work with its member congregations brought out concern about schools. Congregations that draw membership largely from their immediate neighborhoods are most likely to see schools as critical to the well-being of their communities. Much of the education organizing of Austin Interfaith, and indeed the Southwest IAF affiliates all over Texas, emerged from the partnerships between schools and congregations. These partnerships or links have continued, and fostering them is currently a deliberate strategy of Austin Interfaith.

As a result of this practice, schools become more open and welcoming to parents and community members and are more likely to share use of their facilities. Schools become part of the inventory of sites for classes serving thousands of adults in such Austin Interfaith initiatives as ESL and GED programs run in collaboration with the local community college and job training through the program Capital IDEA. As schools become more open to the community, they also become host sites for community meetings on issues such as zoning, traffic, combating drugs, or public housing.

Program enhancements also open up schools to uses outside of the regular school day and may bring in parents/community members. For example, the after-school programs involve parents as instructors and even coordinators. For some parents, involvement in an after-school program is their first opportunity to become engaged in the school.

Teachers See Parents and the Community as Resources

Through neighborhood walks, house meetings, and strong parent presence in the school, teachers gain greater awareness of the concerns and conditions of the local community, which makes them more sensitive to student needs, better able to work with parents to help students achieve, and allies in working for community improvements that will ultimately benefit

the educational environment. The process of organizing in itself brings parents and teachers into closer interaction and opens the eyes of both parties. Over and over again, we heard school staff members say that going on a neighborhood walk opened their eyes to community life. They told of becoming more receptive to a deeper engagement of parents and community members in school life, while they themselves became more engaged in the community.

For example, through regular house meetings, teachers at Walnut Creek engaged with parents in dealing with problems in the area around the school, including trash and people loitering as a result of drug dealing. One teacher told us,

"One big problem around the schools was the drugs and what went along with that. Teachers wouldn't have known about this problem, even though the kids and parents knew, because they were not in the area as much. They learned about it at meetings and got involved."

As a result of house meetings involving Brooke School parents and staff, joint staff-parent committees formed around areas of concern. One concern was children's safety at school dismissal time when there was heavy traffic in the area. Together, parents and teachers came up with a procedure that involved each teacher walking his/her class outside at the end of the day and making sure each child met a parent or caregiver. Although teachers initially were wary of this system, staff and parents grew to appreciate the opportunity to talk with each other and exchange information about the children and community life.

When teachers gain a better sense of the challenges that face both their students and the parents, they are more likely to take these into consideration in their work with students and in their expectations of parents. For example, Alliance Schools teachers told us that their increased understanding of the extent of students' responsibilities at home led them to reconsider the students' potential in the classroom and raise their expectations. In other cases, teachers told us about their increased familiarity with and respect for parents. They said that they were more likely to meet with parents, communicate their expectations for parents' roles and come to appreciate the diversity of roles parents can play. Before, teachers may have had a nagging sense that parents could do more, but they didn't know specifically what they could expect or have means to communicate their expectations. Through the extensive interactions between parents and teachers, teachers gained a better sense of what was reasonable to expect from parents and how best to communicate with them.

Most importantly, several experiences impressed school staff with the power of parents and community members to support them in gaining resources and directing the attention of school and elected officials to issues. Parents were instrumental in obtaining funding for after-school programs and playground renovations and in bringing a health clinic to Zavala. As this report illustrates, the schools have increasingly turned to parents for help in solving problems, advocating for policy changes, gaining resources, and so forth. For example, parents' voices, added to the school's own, influenced the superintendent to intervene in solving construction problems at Zavala, to come up with an improved bilingual education policy and funds for bilingual materials, and to add a Young Scientists program at several Alliance Schools.

Parents and Community Members See Schools as Welcoming and Open to Their Input

The "relational culture" of Alliance Schools opens them to parents and community members as full participants. As a result of such activities as neighborhood walks, after-school programs that include adult education, and house meetings in which school staff participate, parents feel more comfortable in schools and their presence is increased. (The schools we observed did vary in the degree to which parents were present and the nature of their participation.) Organizers and leaders measure the intensity of the organizing effort at their schools in terms of the presence of parents and community members in the schools. Parents' presence, even in informal and spontaneous ways, serves to maintain their awareness of school activities and progress, communication among teachers and parents, and school accountability.

In addition to appreciating parents for their important leadership contributions, the schools also become

more welcoming and respectful of all parents and community members. For example, the principal at Brooke Elementary explained that she keeps her door open and lets her staff and parents know that they don't need to schedule an appointment to meet with her. She measures her own success as a principal by the number of parents who just drop in to talk with her.

Regular "house meetings" at schools offer parents informal opportunities to talk with other parents and staff in the school building. When Alliance Schools feel the need to renew or intensify school/community relations, they often re-institute house meetings as a strategy to bring parents into the school. Zavala's new parent liaison increased the number of parents in the school after a period of decline by instituting Friday morning coffees. "We have coffee, we talk with other parents. We talk about how are the children doing. ...Then we talk to the principal."

Parents and Community Members Take on Meaningful New Roles in Schools

School professionals in general often complain about how hard it is to get parents involved. In light of research showing that parent "involvement" improves school climate and contributes to overall student achievement, schools across the country are looking for ways to increase parent involvement.

We found widespread agreement in Austin that, at Alliance Schools, parents were not merely involved but actually highly "engaged." Parent presence goes beyond standard forms of involvement, which are usually limited to volunteering in activities ancillary to the educational substance of schools, and extends to roles that are integral to the educational program. For example, parents at Zavala have regular weekly meetings with the principal. In several Alliance Schools, parents serve as tutors and even coordinators of the after-school programs. They have also brought in cultural opportunities, such as Ballet Folklorico. At Brooke school, a parent leader organized a Spanish-language storytelling program that brings Spanish-speaking parents into the library to read to children on a regular basis.

Most Alliance Schools have instituted the role of parent liaison. The person hired for this position is typically a strong parent leader who understands the job as developing leaders and inviting parents/

community members to participate in school decision-making bodies, the PTA, Austin Interfaith actions, and so on. Alliance Schools' parents have also served as directors of after-school programs, with responsibility for financial and program management. They often draw on other parents to teach courses or provide experiences that reflect community culture and arts. Parents have participated in Alliance Schools training as colleagues with school staff members, both in the school and through attending conferences and Texas IAF training. Monies available through the Investment Capital Fund, in fact, are designated for joint teacher/parent learning opportunities.

Parents' presence in the schools brings many benefits. When parents gain a first hand knowledge of what goes on in the school and in classrooms, they become more sensitive to teachers' expectations and more effective coaches for their own children. In addition, children are inspired when they see their parents and other community members playing significant roles in the school. Finally, the school is more responsive to parents; parents who are familiar with the inner workings of a school can better hold the school accountable, and school staff are more likely to respect the opinions of parents with whom they are familiar.

Future Directions

As this report illustrates, Austin Interfaith can point to many accomplishments resulting from its school reform organizing. Austin Interfaith members and organizers note, however, that gains require continuing work to maintain and organizing is necessarily ongoing—particularly when it comes to relationships in the schools. Austin Interfaith has a strong track record and reputation for its work. It has added steadily to the number of schools in the network.

Nonetheless, organizers and leaders are intensely interested in deepening their work, specifically by bringing their vision of a relational culture, public accountability, and power analysis to what goes on between teachers and students in classrooms. This aim motivates Austin Interfaith to work with the Institute for Learning.

Looking forward, Austin Interfaith seeks to build on its successes both by reaching deeper into the transformation of teaching and learning and by going broader to develop "Alliance Communities" made up of feeder patterns of schools linked with member congregations. Ultimately, Austin Interfaith's goal is to "change the culture of the District" to reflect the values of Alliance Schools. Future directions must respond to a series of challenges that they have identified. These challenges fall into five categories: impacting the classroom level, extending the work to middle and high school levels, reinforcing links between schools and congregations as the focus of organizing, increasing the participation of African-Americans, and changing the culture of the District as a whole.

Impacting Teaching and Learning

Certainly much of Austin Interfaith's work has already had an impact on classroom practice, as teachers' expectations for their students have increased and they have started to use more challenging curriculum. Further, IAF leadership and researchers have given a great deal of thought to the implications of the "new" economy for teaching and learning, and have written about this in documenting the Alliance Schools philosophy and vision.

However, Austin Interfaith, reflecting the goals of the larger IAF organization with which it is affiliated, is continually working to refine and deepen its work. Austin Interfaith leaders and organizers see the classroom as a site where the principles and values of organizing can be applied more fully. In part, the motivation for this focus stems from a belief that the classroom is the crucible in which the success or failure of reform is determined. Austin Interfaith's role in organizing the annual in-service training for Austin teachers provides another opportunity for refining teaching and learning to fully reflect the concepts inherent in organizing and in the Alliance Schools approach.

Work with Schools in Feeder Patterns Including Middle and High Schools

While most of the Alliance Schools serve elementary students, Austin Interfaith is moving to work across the grade levels in order to address the needs of students after they leave elementary school. Since the development of the Young Scientists Program, which added a sixth grade to several elementary schools, members have been concerned about the quality of middle and high school programs for the majority of students who do not succeed in getting into the Kealing magnet program, and want to extend the reach of their work to students beyond the early grades. To this end, Austin Interfaith began encouraging collaboration between Webb, a middle school, and its feeder school T.A. Brown Elementary, as one component in a larger effort to link elementary, middle, and high schools. Austin Interfaith has also started a first phase of work in two high schools. One element of the strategy to move into other school levels is to place more leaders trained in Alliance Schools strategically into these schools.

Establishing "Alliance Communities"

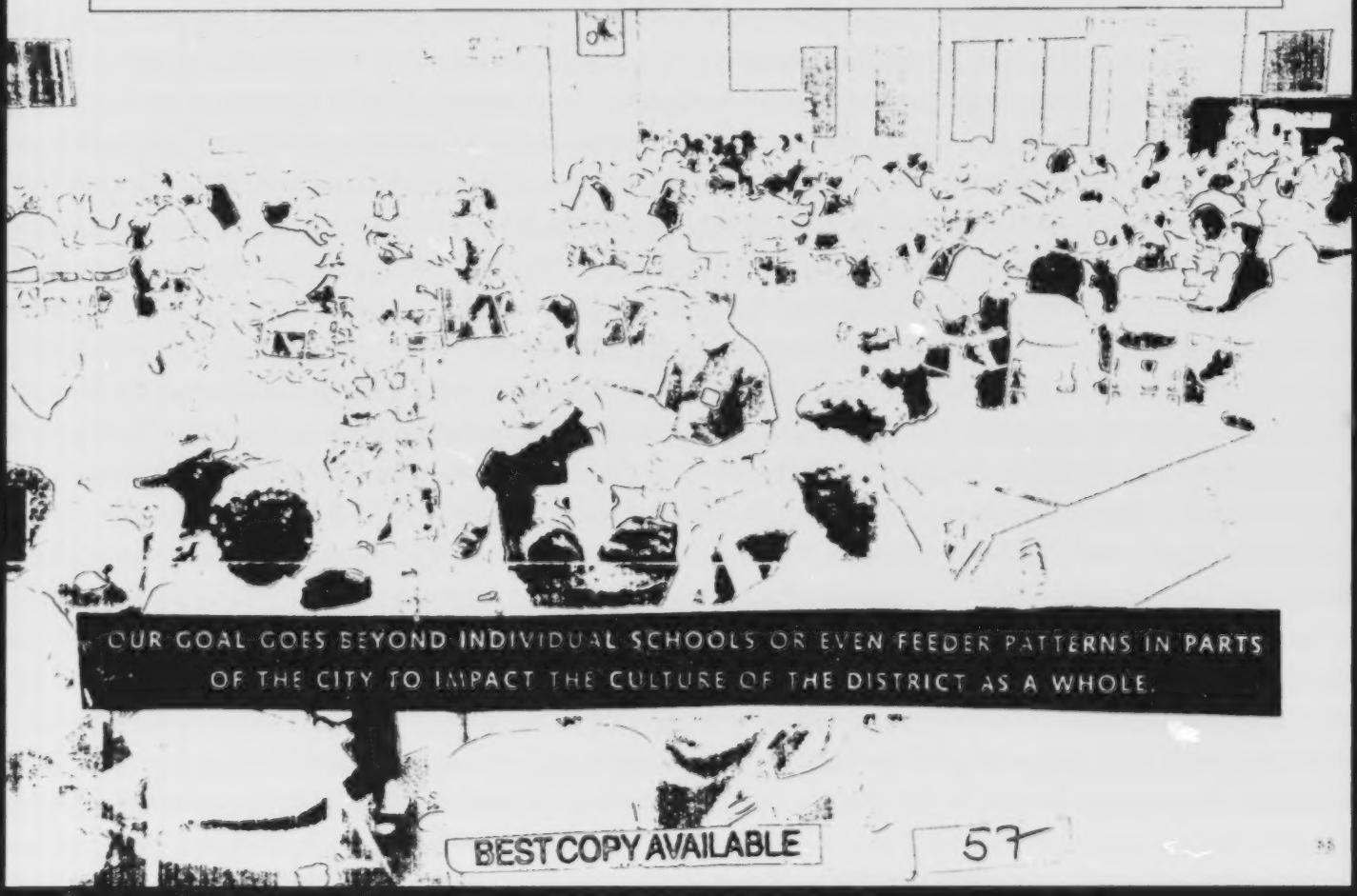
Austin Interfaith sees itself as a community organizing group, not an education organizing group, and schools as institutions (similar to congregations or labor unions) that have a direct impact on families and communities. Austin Interfaith's entry into education issues emerged out of its work in organizing congregations and links between congregations and schools have long been a feature of the work. Indeed, the early education-related efforts in Texas leading to the creation of the Alliance Schools Initiative involved congregations supporting schools by publicly rewarding students for achievement. Austin Interfaith believes in the importance of building and using social capital to strengthen communities, and linking community institutions is an essential element of its organizing strategy. In Austin, congregations have associated themselves with a set of schools in a feeder pattern, mostly within the congregations' geographic areas. These "Alliance Communities" become a kind of unit of focus for Austin Interfaith's work.

Increasing the Participation of African-Americans

Austin Interfaith's membership aim to ensure that schools reach and challenge all children, regardless of race and language fluency. The leadership of Austin Interfaith is proud of the progress that they have made in schools that have a predominance of Hispanic children, but are concerned that schools with large numbers of African-American students are not improving at the same rate. They note higher teacher and principal turnover as evidence that Austin Interfaith needs to give more attention to strengthening community support and relationships across race at these schools.

Changing the Culture of the District

Austin Interfaith leaders see their goal as going beyond individual schools or even feeder patterns in parts of the city to impact the culture of the district as a whole. It is not enough simply to work on changing individual policies one by one as issues emerge. Their goal is to have the entire district work in the same way as Alliance Schools—listening to the concerns of constituents, building and supporting leaders, operating openly and in a spirit of public accountability, respecting parents and the community, and seeing the intimacy of connection between schools and community. Austin Interfaith leaders have seen the benefits of establishing this kind of "relational culture" at the school level. Through the model of leadership development, which has sustained this culture within schools and extended it to other schools, they see the possibility of eventually extending it—not school by school, but in a more holistic way—to the highest reaches of the district. Yet, as with all of the work of organizing, such an effort implies ongoing and continual effort, not simply a program that can be adopted. Already, Austin Interfaith's intimate relationship with schools complicates the definitions of "outsider" and "insider" for Austin Interfaith as a community organizing group. Similarly, changing the district culture will present the challenge of maintaining a necessary creative tension in the relationship between Austin Interfaith and the district, as community leaders who are also School District employees gain increasingly strategic positions within the system.


OUR GOAL GOES BEYOND INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS OR EVEN FEEDER PATTERNS IN PARTS OF THE CITY TO IMPACT THE CULTURE OF THE DISTRICT AS A WHOLE.

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Case Study: LSNA

LOGAN SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Prepared by

RESEARCH FOR ACTION
Suzanne Blanc, Joanna Brown and Aida Nevarez-La Torre

with

CROSS CITY CAMPAIGN FOR URBAN SCHOOL REFORM
Chris Brown

Introduction to Logan Square Neighborhood Association

Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) has a 40-year history of mobilizing neighborhood residents to maintain and improve the quality of community life and to bring additional resources and services into the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago. LSNA prioritizes the needs of low- and moderate-income neighborhood residents, often first or second generation immigrants from Latin America, but also represents the rich economic, cultural, and racial diversity of Logan Square. LSNA's work in reshaping neighborhood schools to better meet the needs of the community evolves from its overall organizing approach, which focuses on developing relationships as the foundation for social change, on building a community that can speak for itself, and on strong neighborhood-based leadership.

According to LSNA, strong communities need strong schools. As written in LSNA's Holistic Plan, the organization's three overarching goals in creating strong schools are to: 1) make schools centers of community life through Community Learning Centers, 2) develop school/community partnerships with parents as leaders, and 3) develop the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program to help parents develop their skills, assist teachers, and build strong relationships in the community. Currently nine neighborhood schools collaborate with the community through their membership in LSNA. LSNA's close collaboration with local schools began in the early 1990s when LSNA spearheaded a community effort to end school overcrowding. The campaign resulted in five new annexes and two new middle schools. Just as importantly, the successful campaign both demonstrated LSNA's power as a community organization and built a foundation of mutual trust and respect between the schools and the community.

Since the campaign against overcrowding, LSNA's work with schools has been critical to increasing the quality of programming and services available to children and families in Logan Square. LSNA's organizing activities serve to: promote widespread democratic participation in the schools; enhance communication between parents, teachers, and children; and bring needed resources into the community. LSNA is active in all eight indicator areas used in this project.[1] In this report, we relate LSNA's accomplishments in detail in four of the areas.[2] The four areas are:

- COMMUNITY POWER
- SOCIAL CAPITAL
- SCHOOL CLIMATE
- LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

THE MACARTHUR DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

RFA is also documenting LSNA's work for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Building Community Capacity Program. The Foundation believes that in order to be effective in fostering individual growth and community development, a community must have the ability to mobilize and use the resources of members, along with outside resources. LSNA, a grantee of the MacArthur Foundation, has worked with Research for Action to create valid and useful documentation of its work, with a focus on two areas—education and housing. Joanna Brown, an LSNA organizer, is also a collaborating researcher with Research for Action on this study. This report draws on findings from the MacArthur-sponsored documentation project.

NOTES

1. For a chart representing LSNA's work in all eight indicator areas, see Appendix C. This chart is not comprehensive, but does illustrate the kinds of strategies LSNA has used in each area and examples of its achievements.

2. The data supporting the accomplishments of LSNA were gathered during site visits in spring and fall 2000. The report is not comprehensive of all LSNA has accomplished, but is intended to illustrate what documentation and measurement of its accomplishments might look like.

The Logan Square Neighborhood Association

LSNA is a multi-issue organization whose work is guided by a Holistic Plan which includes improving local public schools, developing youth leadership, enhancing neighborhood safety, maintaining affordable housing, and revitalizing the local economy. The Core Committee and issues committees revise the plan on a yearly basis. It is approved by the membership of the organization, which includes both individuals and representatives of forty-seven neighborhood organizations.

LSNA was started in the early 1960s by a group of local churches, businesses, and homeowners to address neighborhood concerns arising from rapid suburbanization and deindustrialization of the Chicago metropolitan area. Around the time of LSNA's formation, longtime residents of Logan Square, primarily working-class families of European descent, were leaving the neighborhood, and new residents were attracted to it, originally Cubans and then Puerto Rican families from nearby Humboldt Park. Since then, the neighborhood has become increasingly Latino, mostly Mexican, Puerto Rican and Central American. According to the 2000 census, Latinos made up 65.1% of Logan Square's population.

Changing demographics of Logan Square are reflected in the changing demographics of LSNA leaders and members. In the late 1980s, LSNA's Board, which had been predominantly Anglo, made an explicit commitment to diversify and to hire a new director committed to building a racially and economically diverse organization. This diversity is represented in LSNA's Executive Committee, which in the spring of 2000 was composed of the chairperson of LSNA's home daycare network, three former parent mentors who now participate in governance, instruction, and other volunteer activities at their schools, a local school administrator, and a local banker. The six-member committee consisted of four Latinas and two Anglo men.

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Logan Square and Its Schools

"I arrive to interview the outreach team about the new community survey they are doing for Monroe School Community Learning Center. Six Latinas are sitting in the school's teachers' lounge. The organizer told me that the mothers had taken it upon themselves to move into the teachers' lounge, which she perceived as their sense of ownership of the school. When I arrive, each woman has an orange folder in front of her, and they're looking intently at maps that are blocked off with colored markers to show the different parts of the neighborhood. They're engaged in animated discussion about who should go where."

"We start the focus group, and they agree that everyone on the outreach committee participated in the Community Learning Center last year. Margarita[3] works in the Center. Marisol is on the student council for the Center. Everyone has taken GED or English classes. Someone else jokes, "This is the organization of the Monroe School." Three of the women were parent mentors. Latitia helped recruit parents to run in the most recent Local School Council election and is also the president of the bilingual committee." RFA RESEARCHER'S FIELDNOTES, FALL 2000

As this vignette suggests, parents in Logan Square demonstrate a sense of engagement and ownership unusual in urban schools. While some opportunities for involvement are integral to Chicago school reform, the level of parent engagement has been generated through LSNA's organizing efforts. During the late 1980s, when LSNA intensified its parent organizing, most public schools in Logan Square were over 95 percent low-income and 90 percent Latino. Median family income in Logan Square dropped 15% during the 1980s to $22,500. Middle class professionals of all ethnic and racial groups were still drawn to parts of Logan Square because of its high-quality housing and proximity to downtown Chicago, but in general they either didn't have children or didn't utilize the public schools. Student mobility rates in Logan Square schools ranged from 30-44% annually. Standardized test scores were low, with the majority of students scoring in the bottom percentiles in both math and reading on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. When LSNA began its major school campaigns in the early 1990s, more than 13% of Logan Square residents had immigrated to the U.S. in the previous decade.

During the late 1980s, community groups across Chicago were mobilizing in support of school reform legislation and working to make the reform a success by recruiting and training parent and community members to run as candidates in Local School Council (LSC) elections. Under Chicago's school reform law, LSCs have the power to hire principals and approve budgets.

For years, individual schools in Logan Square had been negotiating with the Chicago Board of Education to end severe overcrowding. During the early 1990s, LSNA played a crucial role in bringing schools across the neighborhood together to address this common problem. Since the successful campaign against overcrowding, LSNA has worked with LSCs to seek out and select principals who are committed to cooperating with the community. Building on relationships with principals who feel a commitment to the community, as well as on relationships developed during the campaign against overcrowding, LSNA has collaborated with schools to develop innovative, community-centered programs.

In the past five years, all LSNA elementary schools have experienced significant increases in student achievement, even while the demographics remained constant. For example, from 1996 to 2001, the

NOTES

3. To preserve confidentiality, people's real names are not used in this memo. The exception is where we are quoting directly from other public documents.

percentage of students at one school reading at or above the national norm on the yearly Iowa Test of Basic Skills rose from 17.5% to 29.3%. In math, the number rose from 19.5% to 31.4%. Other schools showed similar increases over the same time period. Teacher surveys and parent and principal interviews attribute many of these gains to the regular presence of parents in classrooms through LSNA's Parent-Teacher Mentor Program.

Public school stakeholders and school reform advocates interviewed for this project concur that LSNA has built one of the most productive school/community partnerships in Chicago. LSNA's Parent-Teacher Mentor Program and Community Learning Centers are widely seen as model programs for bringing families into schools and engaging low-income parents with their children's education in new and empowering ways. Although democratic processes within LSNA occasionally lead to policy stances that challenge the Board of Education or the positions of other education reform groups, even stakeholders interviewed for this project who have disagreed with some of LSNA's positions recognize LSNA's important role in improving neighborhood schools and as a powerful advocate for low-income families and communities.

LSNA's Holistic Plan: Recognizing the Interdependence of Schools and Communities

"LSNA has been very active in [making schools] a center of community, not just a place where kids and a group of professionals descend...It is not just a place where you can depend on kids to receive an education, but also the place where you participate in the governance and deciding what goes on there and building it up and helping it grow."

LOGAN SQUARE MINISTER, SPRING 2000

"When I came into the school for the first time, it was important for me to understand what was happening, but I was one of those people who were very timid. After three or four years, I got more involved. I don't understand it all yet, but I know the importance of getting involved. I'm new here, but I'm happy to be part of the Local School Council and president of one of the school committees."

PARENT LEADER, FALL 2000

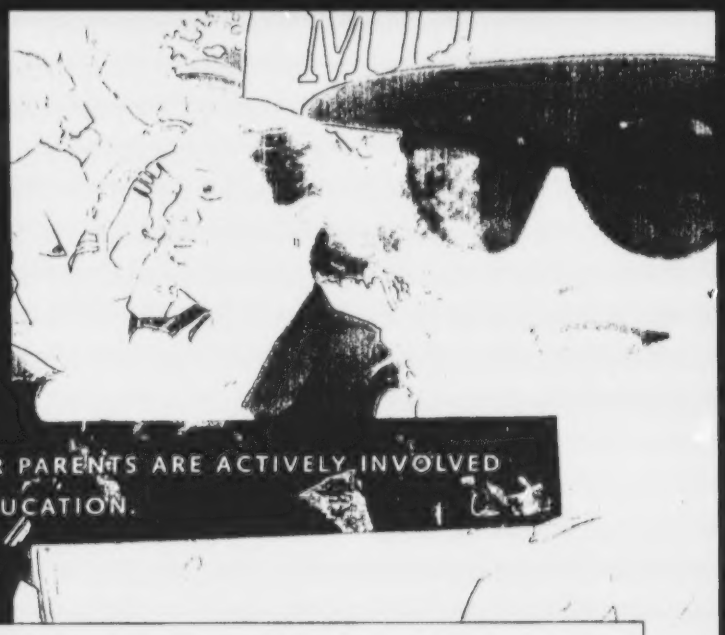
LSNA's work with schools is part of its holistic approach to addressing the needs and dreams of the Logan Square community. Although it had been a multi-issue organizing group since the early 1960s, in 1994, LSNA unveiled an innovative long-term plan to rebuild the Logan Square Community. ["We decided it's time to envision the community we want to live in and then build it,"] said the chair of LSNA's Holistic Committee. "We want to build on our many strengths, rather than just react to problems." (LSNA press release, May 5, 1994). Representatives of thirty-four local schools, churches, block clubs, and social service agencies—including seniors and youth, parents and pastors, teachers, residents and business people—worked together for over two years in small committees and large groups to set forth a specific agenda for building a healthier and more stable neighborhood.

The first Holistic Plan included resolutions relating to education, housing, safety, and jobs. Parents, teachers, principals, and community members built on relationships they had developed in the campaign against overcrowding to write three education resolutions, which focused on the interdependence of the schools and the community. In its first Holistic Plan,[4] LSNA resolved to:

- Develop schools as community centers because *"the health of any community is dependent on the availability of common space for interaction, education, service provision, recreation, culture, and arts."*
- Train parents to work in the classrooms of LSNA schools because *"children learn better when their parents are actively involved in their education."*

NOTES

4. This information is based on LSNA documents prepared for the 32nd Annual Congress, May 1994.



CHILDREN LEARN BETTER WHEN THEIR PARENTS ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THEIR EDUCATION.

- Support community controlled education because the *"health of any community is dependent on the quality of education provided to its residents."* This resolution included support for training for LSC members and a program developed by local banks and LSNA to help Logan Square teachers buy homes in the neighborhood.

Following the adoption of the first Holistic Plan, LSNA received funding to pilot the first Parent-Teacher Mentor Program. Local School Council members and other parents worked with LSNA to bring the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program into their schools and then to keep their schools open after regular school hours for Community Learning Centers. In addition to working directly with parents, LSNA has continued to involve principals and teachers in LSNA activities such as quarterly principal meetings, the neighborhood-wide Education Committee, and the LSNA Core Committee (which provides guidance for an annual evaluation of LSNA's work and the revision of LSNA's Holistic Plan).

LSNA's recognition of the interconnections between school and community and the importance of school/community collaboration is well illustrated by its two largest programs. The Parent-Teacher Mentor Program, which has graduated over 840 parents, was developed to provide stay-at-home, often socially isolated mothers with an opportunity to participate in leadership training and become more engaged in their children's school. The principal of Funston Elementary School originated the idea for the program, which pays parents a small stipend to attend leadership training and then gain a minimum of 100 hours of training as they work with children in classrooms. Partnering with the Funston School and a technical assistance consultant (Community Organizing for Family Issues), LSNA developed a program with far-reaching effects. As parent mentors, mothers (and occasionally fathers) increase their understanding of the current culture and expectations of the schools; they take on new roles such as tutoring, reading to children, or coordinating literacy programs; and, they also learn that the skills honed by "just" being a good parent translate into leadership skills in the larger community.

The Community Learning Centers are another major example of school/community collaboration in Logan Square. LSNA and the schools had agreed that the new school annexes would be open for community activities. The first Community Learning Center was created by the first group of graduates from Funston's pilot Parent-Teacher Mentor Program. The women developed a community survey and began knocking on doors to find out what the neighborhood wanted in a community center. They then advocated with citywide providers to get the desired programs. Since then, Funston's Community Learning Center and five others, which collectively serve over 1,400 children and adults a week, continue to be guided by the vision and energy of neighborhood residents.

The programs generated through school-community collaboration in Logan Square are also a significant source of income for the neighborhood, increasing economic security for the parents, providing bridges

to paid employment, and increasing resources for neighborhood schools. LSNA's programs provided approximately $127,000 in the past year to support daytime school operations through stipends for parent mentors and support for mathematics and reading activities. In addition, at least $305,000 more dollars were paid directly to community residents and businesses through the salaries of Community Learning Center staff and purchases of food and supplies.

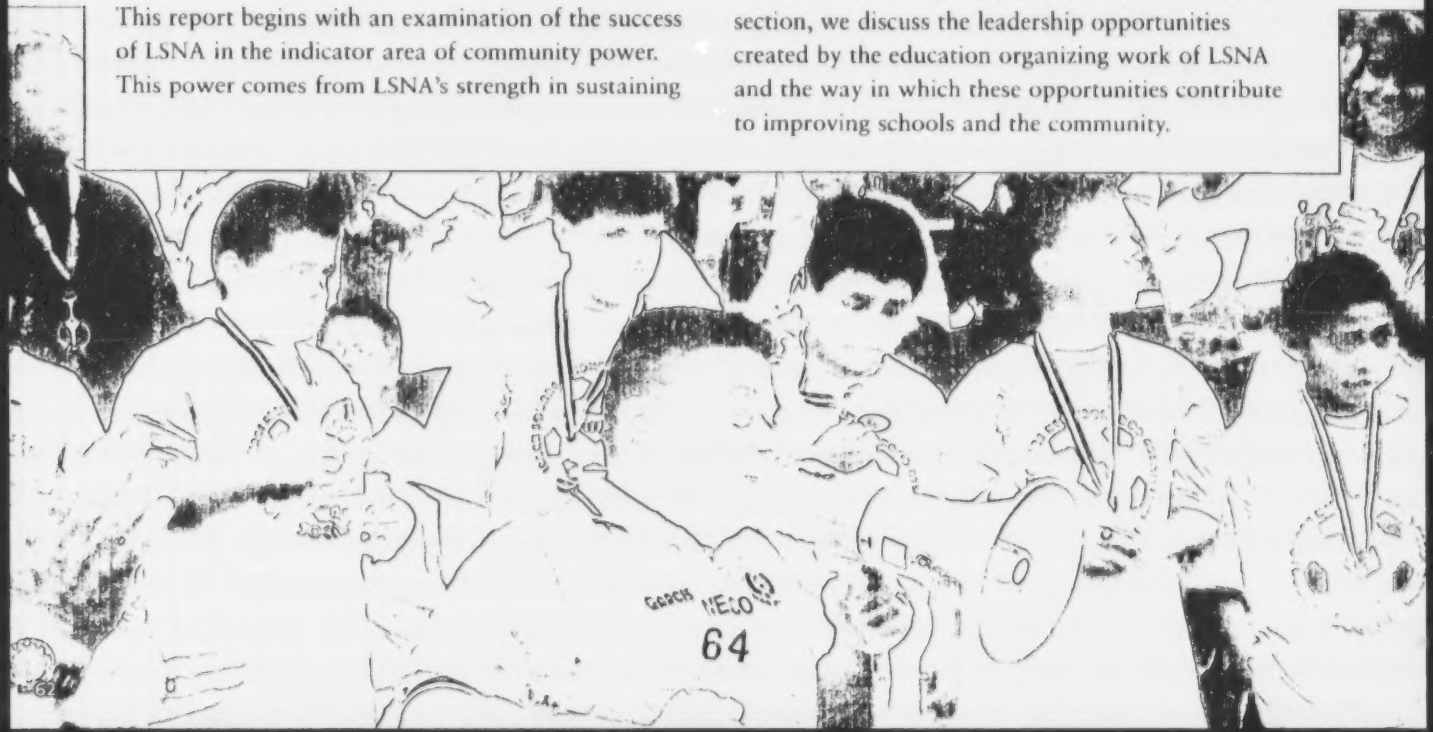
Indicators and Measures

LSNA is active in every indicator area. This report, however, discusses LSNA's activity in four of the eight indicator areas: community power, social capital, school climate, and leadership development. We selected these areas because they were particularly salient in both the interviews we conducted and the events we observed during site visits. Archival documentation, including reports and newspaper clippings, supports these as areas of LSNA accomplishment.

The indicator areas highlighted in this report reflect LSNA's ability to use and maintain community power to create strong, respectful partnerships between the schools and the community. Because LSNA parents, principals, and teachers are all members of a powerful community organization, the campaigns and programs they create are based on parent/professional relationships that are different from those that traditionally characterize urban schools.

This report begins with an examination of the success of LSNA in the indicator area of community power. This power comes from LSNA's strength in sustaining campaigns over time, developing a strong organizational identity and drawing political attention to its agenda. LSNA's successful campaign to alleviate school overcrowding, which involved gaining political recognition and winning new buildings for neighborhood schools, is one illustration of its power. LSNA's power in the realm of education continues to build as LSNA leaders and members take active roles in their Local School Councils, create school-based programs that are controlled by the community, and successfully advocate for city, state, and national funding for these programs. Second, the report examines LSNA's accomplishments in the area of social capital. The LSNA organizing model is a relational one. Its goal is to build networks of people who can act collectively around shared concerns. LSNA has worked hard and successfully to build relationships among parents, between parents and teachers, and among principals in the neighborhood.

The report looks next at the impact of LSNA's organizing in an indicator area directly related to outcomes for students, school climate. We show that the increased presence of parents in the Logan Square schools is helping to create an orderly, disciplined, and respectful climate for learning. Lastly, the report examines the area of leadership development. One of the primary tasks of community organizing is helping community members become leaders. It is the strength of these leaders that ensures that the organizing stays focused on improving the life chances of low- and moderate-income families and communities. In this section, we discuss the leadership opportunities created by the education organizing work of LSNA and the way in which these opportunities contribute to improving schools and the community.



First Indicator Area: Community Power

LSNA's *sustained campaigns* over time, *its clear organizational identity,* and its success in gaining *political recognition for its agenda,* are all evidence of the community power that LSNA is using to make Logan Square schools into responsive, high-quality institutions. LSNA's capacity to demonstrate community power ensures that the voices, values, and needs of LSNA members are major forces in shaping the community's schools. Community power is a critical feature of LSNA's ability to enter into school/community collaborations as a full partner, based on relationships of trust and mutual respect.

Sustained Campaigns

"After years of meetings with the Board of Education, they finally bought the old Ames property for a new middle school. But that wasn't the end of it. One morning, we got a phone call from one of our leaders saying that the Board of Ed was closing a deal on the sale of the property to a private developer that afternoon. Immediately, the Education Committee and the parent mentors were on the phone to the parents who had been working on the campaign. Two hours later, hundreds of community people were picketing. Later that day, we found out that they had cancelled the deal. Finally, in 1997, after six years of organizing, ground was broken for the Ames Middle School." RFA RESEARCHER'S FIELDNOTES, BASED ON STORIES ABOUT THE FOUNDING OF AMES MIDDLE SCHOOL TOLD BY LSNA LEADERS, MAY 1999

LSNA's ability to sustain campaigns over time is one important measure of a strong community base, which contributes to effective school/community collaborations. LSNA's campaign against overcrowding began in the early 1990s and continued for over five years. During our fieldwork, RFA heard many stories of the abysmal conditions in Logan Square schools during those years: 45 children in a classroom; classes meeting in the nurse's office or on the stage and auditorium floor; art and music classes cancelled because the space was needed for regular classroom instruction. During the first phase of the campaign against overcrowding, parents from three elementary schools proved that they could work together to identify a mutually acceptable location for a new middle school.

The first victory spurred parents from five more elementary schools to push for additional space. Together, parents from these eight elementary schools spent another year and a half preparing to appeal to the Board of Education. As we were told by a former president of LSNA, who was also a parent and LSC chair,

"There were many meetings with parents to prepare for going down to the Board of Education. What was funny was that no one would commit in a large group. But we went around and got individual commitments. We had many, many meetings. It was a year and a half of meetings. And then we finally all came together in one big room. You could feel the tension in the room. And once we started the meeting it was like, "Well, you know, so and so, you said that if so and so supported it, you will support it," and we would call on the names, "Well, are you here in support?" It was empowering because you finally beat this huge Board of Ed."

Once the Board of Education had firmly committed itself to the buildings, LSNA began another round of organizing, this time to gain a seat at the table in the process of principal selection for the yet to be created Ames Middle School. Although LSCs have the right and the obligation to hire the principal for an existing school, the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Paul Vallas, insisted on choosing the principal for the new middle school. To convince Vallas of the value of community input, parent mentors and LSC members from two of Ames feeder schools, Mozart and

PAUL VALLAS CAME TO OUR NEIGHBORHOOD TO GET A SENSE OF HOW PARENTS, TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, AND PASTORS WERE WORKING TOGETHER.

Funston, visited his office to share with him the important work that LSNA was doing in the Logan Square schools. A few days later, Paul Vallas came to Logan Square for a meeting about LSNA's school-based Community Learning Centers.

According to LSNA's Executive Director,

"If you don't have power, you're not going to have a meeting with Paul Vallas. We told him he needed to come to the neighborhood and get a sense of how parents, teachers, principals, and pastors were working together. He was trying to change the standards for the Chicago Public Schools then, and our president at the time told him, "We need you, but you also need us. He needed the parents; he needed the principals; he needed the teachers. He got the point. At the end of the meeting, Vallas came and said, "We want to see your top education leaders." That was when he said we could form the committee for the principal selection."

A committee made up of local principals and LSC members selected as principal a local teacher who had been a leader in the fight against overcrowding, was at that time LSNA's vice president, and had expressed a strong commitment to making Ames "a community-centered school." Vallas agreed with the selection.

These examples show that LSNA has strong community leaders who can sustain campaigns over the time it takes to develop power and "gain a seat at the table." The fact that LSNA was able to exert such an influence on Chicago Public Schools' policy-makers won respect for LSNA's power, and enabled LSNA to enter into school/community collaborations as an equal partner.

LSNA's Strong Organizational Identity

LSNA's power as a community organization is also evidenced in its clear identity as a multi-issue, community-based organization that represents the needs and dreams of its ethnically, racially, and economically diverse neighborhood. LSNA has succeeded in becoming an organization which can provide services to meet community needs without following the model of more traditional service agencies, where low-income people are positioned solely as recipients of services. Strong community leadership within the organization, democratic

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decision-making, and fidelity to the Holistic Plan ensure that LSNA continues to represent community interests. LSNA's strong organizational identity is apparent from its neighborhood-based leadership structure and the extensive public recognition of LSNA's work.

LSNA's leadership structure and approach to organizing are designed to develop and sustain strong community leadership within the organization. LSNA offers multiple avenues for involvement, both formal and informal, which provide ongoing opportunities for the development and participation of articulate neighborhood spokespeople and strategists. Neighborhood-based leadership is also evident on LSNA's key governing bodies, including its Issues Committee, Core Committee, and Executive Board. Three of the six members of the Executive Board are parent leaders from the community.

LSNA's involvement in neighborhood schools also provides settings for the growth of community leaders. During the period of RFA's research, we have observed a new set of education leaders, following in the footsteps of a former generation of parent leaders who led the struggle for new buildings and brought the Parent-Teacher Mentor Programs and Community Learning Centers to their schools. Many of the earlier education leaders are still involved with LSNA, but now have staff positions with LSNA or other community organizations.

LSNA's strong organizational identity and ability to build community power are also reflected in the extensive public recognition awarded LSNA's efforts and achievements. Representatives of neighborhood banks, churches, and the Logan Square YMCA are members of the LSNA Board. These organizations worked closely with LSNA on its Holistic Plan to develop shared approaches for bringing affordable housing and new resources into the community. A former LSNA president, currently director of the neighborhood YMCA, describes how LSNA's identity as a diverse and unified community group helps it to gain public recognition.

"The Holistic Plan forces us to interact with each other...And we come up with very creative solutions and look at how we can best utilize our resources. It also has the influence to [get] the attention of the mayor or the superintendent of the Board of Education. We will have their support because they know we're all working together. And that has a lot of credibility with funders, too. When we present a proposal and everybody's at the table, who's going to deny that?"

Examples of public recognition during the period of this research include the Chicago Community Trust's 2001 James Brown Award for Outstanding Community Service, extensive radio and television coverage of LSNA's Parent-Teacher Mentor Program, and LSNA's hosting a site visit from a national consortium of education funders. Funding is also evidence for public recognition of LSNA as an organization able to create school/community partnerships and LSNA's multiple sources of funding enhance its power within school/community collaborations. LSNA's school-based programs are funded through many sources, including: the Chicago Board of Education; the Chicago Department of Human Services; the Chicago Annenberg Challenge (a school reform initiative that supported LSNA as an external partner to five Logan Square schools); the MacArthur Foundation; the Polk Bros. Foundation and several other smaller Chicago foundations; the Illinois State Board of Education; the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs; the Illinois Community College Board; and the Federal government's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

Political Attention to LSNA's Agenda

As a result of LSNA's sustained campaigns, its strong organizational identity, and its successful programs, LSNA has gained substantial political recognition for its approach to school/community collaboration. Evidence of LSNA's political recognition includes:

- LSNA's ongoing relationships with city and state politicians and school district administrators. Politicians and administrators such as Paul Vallas (former CEO of Chicago Public Schools), State Senator Miguel del Valle, and many aldermen have met over the years with LSNA leaders and have supported policies to open up public schools to community groups. LSNA's relationship with the

top administration of Chicago Public Schools is continuing with the current CEO, Arne Duncan. LSNA also has built relationships with national political representatives. These politicians and others, such as Paul Vallas, have met with and responded to the demands of LSNA parents to open up public schools as community centers.

- LSNA's campaign for state funding for community centers. In the spring of 1999, LSNA's two state senators, Miguel del Valle and Lisa Madigan, and state representative Willie Delgado recognized the work of LSNA and used it as a model for a statewide bill to provide funds for after-school programs for children and families. LSNA mobilized community members, school leaders, and Community Learning Center students for a letter writing campaign and testimony before the state legislature. Although the Senate Rules Committee killed the bill, LSNA did succeed in receiving state money to provide partial funding for the Community Learning Centers for a year.

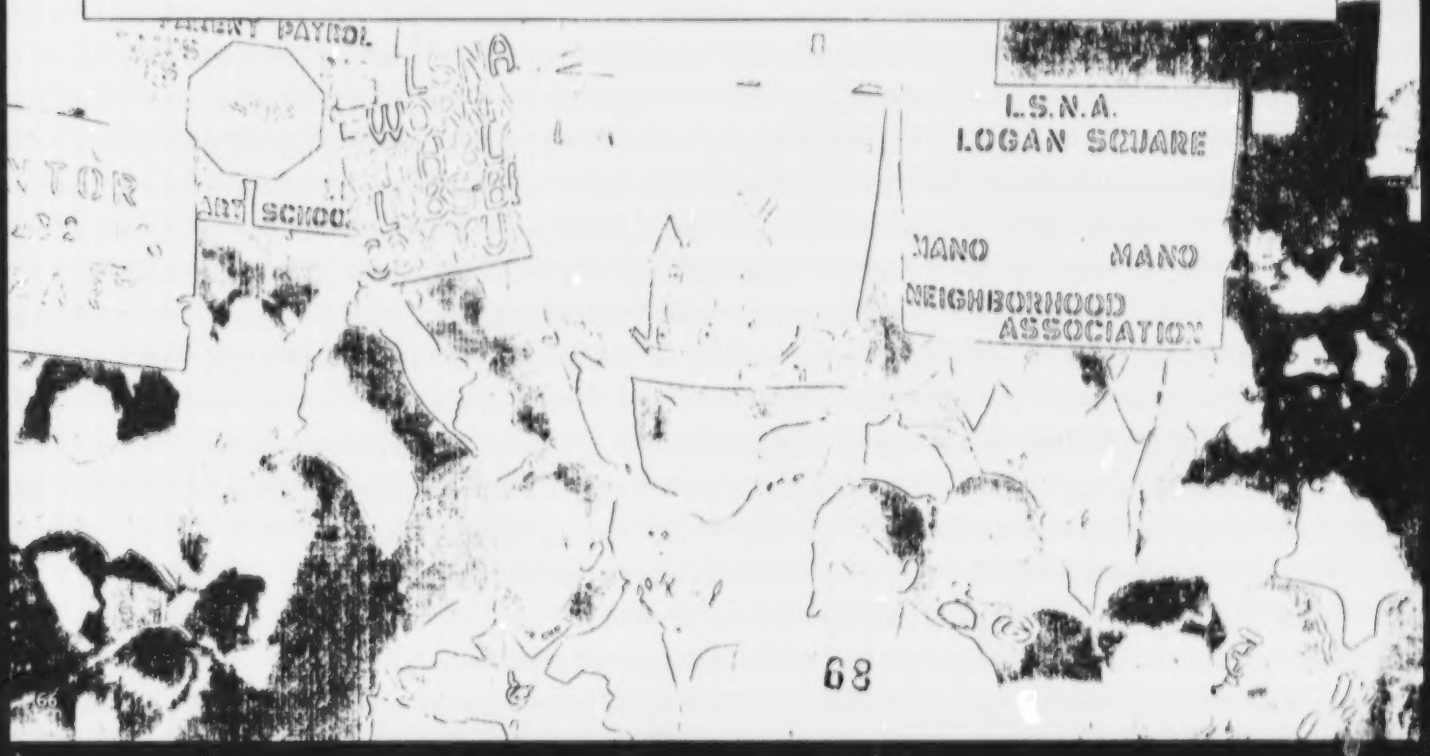
- An LSNA leader was invited to testify before then President Clinton and Vice President Gore about the value of after-school programming. Subsequently, the Federal government has recognized LSNA's approach to school/community collaboration by awarding a three-year (2001-2004) 21st Century grant to fund the Community Learning Centers.

Second Indicator Area: Social Capital

LSNA's organizing model is a relational one; its major approach to organizing is to build networks of people within and across communities who can act collectively on their shared concerns. We use the term "social capital" as a way of referring to these relationships of mutual trust within and across communities. The building of social capital is especially evident when parents are beginning to develop relationships with each other and with school staff. These relationships lead to increased parent engagement in the life of schools. Social capital is also evident in the relationships that school principals in Logan Square have developed with LSNA and with each other. In this section, we begin by looking at new *relationships of trust developed among community members* as they become involved with the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program and the Community Learning Centers. We then look at *enhanced levels of communication between parents and teachers*, and finally we look at *new networks of principals in LSNA schools*.

New Relationships among Community Members

Both parent mentors and school staff have described the dramatic personal transformation and newfound sense of trust and community for parents who participate in parent mentor training and doing



outreach for community centers (for the story of how LSNA started these programs, please see the box "Creating Schools as Centers of Community" on page 69). The programs create "bonding capital" (relationships of trust among people who are similar in terms of race, class, ethnicity, or social roles), as low-income women share stories about their lives and support each other in recognizing the strengths they already have, as well as in developing visions and goals. Typically the parents most involved in LSNA's programs are low-income women who have not been actively involved in their children's schools, in neighborhood organizations, or in the formal job market. Isabel, a Puerto Rican woman who grew up in the mainland United States and who had attended college for a time, told us a story of social isolation and lack of personal direction that is common among this group and that we heard over and over again in interviews, focus groups, and public presentations.

"I used to be one of those moms who just dropped their kids off at the school, but the first week we had the parent mentor training program it opened my eyes a lot, because you are so used to thinking about your kids, the house and everybody else, that you are never thinking about yourself."

Many of the parent mentor participants are either recent immigrants who don't speak English or women who have limited social contacts outside of their kinship networks. U.S.-born women, as well as immigrants from Latin America, vividly described new connections with other adults as well as with their own children that resulted from their participation in the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program. Isabel, who is now a parent organizer for the program, told us,

"The program is great because it changes a lot of people's lives. Not only for myself, but when other mothers first get into the program, their self-esteem, and everything is so low. When they first started, they were like really quiet; they would keep to themselves. And now you can't get them to shut up sometimes. I mean you see the complete difference, they really change their life. They are more outgoing. They are willing to do more for their kids. It's like night and day, they're so different."

Another mother described a similar experience of connection with the larger community while working with students, teachers, and other parents on outreach for the new Ames Community Learning Center.

"The Community Center has made us. I have been married for 15 years and I had never had a job. In the beginning, I had some problems with my husband because he didn't want me to go out. And I told him, really - what I need is to go out, to know, to talk. And here I learned to talk because before my world was my daughter and my husband. And now I feel different. I'm a different person."

The coordinator of the Funston Community Center also described the creation of new relationships among parents:

"The fact that parents have more roles in the school is important. We communicate a lot among ourselves. The parents know and support one another more. So, for example, if one parent cannot pick up her child, then that parent calls another parent to do it and it is done. I have also seen parents wanting

to work for other parents. They are more interested in the Center and how everyone is developing their skills...When the Center first started, I thought it will not last because the community was not going to respond. And I was wrong. We have seen an overwhelming response from the community."

Enhanced Communication between Parents and Teachers

Improved relationships between parents and teachers, known as "bridging capital," are another result of school/community partnerships in Logan Square classrooms. This evolving sense of trust is critical for schools in low-income communities and communities of color where parents and school staff tend to blame each other for children's lack of progress. As parents work closely with teachers, they develop an understanding of what actually happens in the classrooms and learn how they can help their own children. This leads to increased parent involvement with homework, in reading to their children, and in leading activities such as Family Math and Family Literacy. As teachers work with parents, they develop new respect for the resources that low-income, immigrant mothers can bring to education, both for their own children and for the school as a whole.

Parent mentors universally attest that working directly with teachers helps them understand how important it is to support the teachers and help their own children meet the requirements for success in school. As one parent said, *"Being here has helped me work more with my children. I pay attention to the work that is assigned to them. I know how they work and how to help them improve."*

Parents' respect for teachers increases as they see the challenges of teaching in the overcrowded Chicago schools. According to one parent mentor,

"At first I was so nervous and did not really trust the teachers, but all that changed once I worked in the classroom. Now we trust each other. At first, I thought that teachers did not do their work or that they really did not want to work with children. Once I started to work here, I have learned that the teachers work a lot and that with so many children in the classroom it is very difficult to work alone."

From the teachers' perspective, parents become valued partners in the classrooms. As one teacher says,

"At this school, we have seen [the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program] work very well. Those teachers who have parents in the classroom do not get tired of praising them. They really see them as essential to their teaching...And believe me, teachers who have parent mentors in their classes see them as more than a mentee. They see them as partners and friends."

One teacher explained,

"Before, parents were seen as disciplinarians at home and teachers were the educators at the school. Now parents are seen as partners in educating the children in the school and in the home."

A parent leader made the same point.

"Now teachers have a need for parents in their classrooms. Before teachers did not want a parent in their room working with them. Maybe teachers thought the parents did not have the ability to work in the classroom and now they have seen that parents can."

Creating Schools As Centers of Community

School leaders were among the creators of LSNA's first Holistic Plan. *"One of the things we really wanted to encourage was more parent involvement in the schools,"* explained Rita Riveron, LSC president at Mozart school. *"There were always the same four or five of us volunteering for everything. We felt that to really improve the school we were going to need to get other parents involved. So increased parent involvement was one of the resolutions of LSNA's Holistic Plan and we set about finding ways to achieve this."*

Another resolution of the Holistic Plan came from LSNA's and the school's fight for the school annexes. In a neighborhood with very few public spaces, it seemed a crime that the schools sat empty 75% of the time. So when the annexes were built, it was with the idea that they would become community centers outside of regular school hours. This idea was also incorporated into the Holistic Plan and was met so enthusiastically that even schools that didn't have the new annexes, such as Brentano, were on board for creating new community centers.

In the spring of 1995, in cooperation with COFI (Community Organizing Around Family Issues), LSNA trained the first forty parents as mentors at Mozart and Funston Elementary Schools in preparation for working in classrooms with the students. During the training, parents were asked to think of themselves as leaders and to set personal and school/community goals. This first group had a very hard time even thinking of goals for themselves. As Maria Montesinos, a Mozart parent said, *"I am not used to thinking of myself. Others, yes, but not myself. But the training and follow-up we had was good. It really forced us to think about ourselves, why thinking of goals for ourselves helps other people."*

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Indeed it did. Many of the Parent Mentors had set personal goals around obtaining their GEDs or learning English. However, they were finding it very difficult to achieve their goals. Places that offered GED were too far to walk or entailed complicated public transportation routes; childcare wasn't offered, or was an additional charge, or had a mile-long waiting list. A group of seven Funston Parent Mentors dreamed of having adult education classes right in their school, with convenient hours and free childcare. The Logan Square Neighborhood Association was right there with them. Coming from a community organizing rather than a social service perspective, they realized that in order to create a successful community center with programs that people really wanted to attend, they had to find out what people in the neighborhood really wanted, and what was keeping them from getting it. They had a pretty good idea that their needs were typical, but they wanted to do some hard research to back it up.

Their research didn't come from the library, the census, or even the Internet. It came from knocking on people's doors. They talked to people about their goals, their needs, and their obstacles. They learned a lot about the neighborhood and the people who shaped it. *"It was a life-changing experience for me,"* says Funston parent and community center coordinator Ada Ayala. *"I thought I had a lot of problems! But I talked to people who have so many more problems and needs than I do. This experience motivated me to learn more, to achieve my goals, and in doing so enabled me to help others better. I wanted to be able to tell them, 'yes, there is help for you.'"*

Ayala and the other parents were true to their goals. After talking to about 700 people in the neighborhood and in the school, they set out to find free programs that would address the top priorities named in the survey: GED classes in English and Spanish, English as a Second Language classes and affordable childcare. Another concern that was brought out in the interviews and surveys was the need for security in and around the building so people would feel secure going there at night. The group had a shoestring budget for security and childcare but did not have money for classes. They negotiated with Malcom X College for over six months and finally managed to bring in the classes for free.

Since the success of the Funton Community Center, LSNA has worked with three other schools (Brentano, Monroe, and Mozart) to open Community Learning Centers using the same model of parent mentor graduates going out into the community, doing surveys and interviews and forming a set of priority programs based on the interview findings. As each new center opens, it becomes part of a network that helps the Center tackle issues that go beyond one single community center, like funding.

(This narrative is excerpted from "The Whisper of Revolution: Logan Square Schools as Centers of Change" written by Susan Adler Yanun and published in *PRAGmatics*, Fall 1999, pp.7-10. Since the article was completed, the Ames Middle School has built on the model of the other centers to develop a curriculum project in which parent mentors worked with students and teachers to develop, implement, and analyze a community survey. This project led to the opening of the Ames Community Learning Center in September 2001. At the Schneider School, parent mentors and community members developed a center which opened in January 2002.)

New Networks between School Principals and LSNA

Relationships of trust among school principals and between the principals and LSNA are also an important aspect of social capital. These relationships make possible the ongoing creation and implementation of LSNA's school-based programs and form a basis for the evolving collaboration between the community and the schools. Schools and community groups are characterized by very different cultural norms and forms of organization. According to Amanda Rivera, now principal of Ames Middle School, LSNA's campaign against overcrowding laid the basis for the evolving trust between principals and the community. *"LSNA got the opportunity as a community organization to learn more about the culture of schools, [and] the schools got the opportunity to learn more about the culture of the community."*[5]

Building on the relationships that evolved during the campaign against overcrowding and through principals' participation in creating LSNA's Holistic Plan, LSNA organizers have continued to bring LSNA principals together for quarterly meetings. These meetings provide an unusual opportunity for principals to share problems and strategies with each other, as well as providing a forum for developing new initiatives. According to one principal, *"There's a level of trust that we can be honest . . .. We realize we're all in the same boat."* Another explains, *"We talk about what was successful, what wasn't successful from a previous year. And then maybe we talk about some new ideas, some new initiatives that are coming out...We didn't do this before LSNA got us together."* This group provides an opportunity for principals to collaborate on implementing their schools' Parent-Teacher Mentor Programs and Community Learning Centers. One initiative endorsed by the principals' group was a yearly neighborhood-wide reading celebration, which serves as a year-end culmination to the Links to Literacy campaigns used in the schools. LSNA has brought together the Links'coordinators from all of the schools to exchange ideas and plan a joint outdoor celebration as a reward for the best 600 readers. Students in these schools read more than 150,000 books last year.

NOTES

5. Quotation from "The Whisper of Revolution: Logan Square Schools as Centers of Change," by Susan Adler Yanun, PRAGmatics, Fall 1999, 7-10.

Principals perceive LSNA as a valuable provider of technical assistance and funding. As one principal told us, *"It was absolutely mandatory that they were there for us because we could not possibly have done [these programs] on our own...Having someone who functions outside the system actually helps bring resources."*

Third Indicator Area: School Climate

School climate is often one of the first areas of school change addressed by parents and community members. Parents in schools across the country express frustration over school environments that are unsafe, where their children are not disciplined, and where neither they nor their children feel respected. LSNA's school/community partnerships *invite parents into the school,* where the first projects that many parent mentors take on relate to school safety. Having parents in the classrooms through the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program also creates a *more intimate environment for students,* which is reflected in a decrease in discipline referrals. Finally, as parents become more familiar with what is happening in their children's classrooms, they have also started to work with the LSNA Education Committee on a campaign to *improve the climate for learning* in Logan Square classrooms.

Inviting Parents into the School

Parents, teachers, and principals describe the positive impact of having parents in the schools since collaboration with LSNA began. According to one teacher, *"When I came here [7 years ago], I don't remember seeing that many parents in the programs. Now it's parents everywhere. And it's great ...So the children take the good behavior from the parents and the teachers."*

Parents in all the schools formed patrols to ensure safety around the perimeter of the schools. Parent mentors have been a major source for volunteers for the schools' safety patrols and played important roles in organizing many of them. Other safety issues that parents have taken on include getting rid of prostitution around one school, closing down drug houses near schools, organizing neighbors to stay outside while children are going to and from school, and organizing campaigns for traffic safety.

A More Intimate Environment for Students

Parent mentors play an important role in improving the climate within classrooms by giving help to individuals and small groups, keeping students on task, and developing close relationships with students. One major impact of the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program is that it lowers the student/teacher ratio. Parent mentors give students needed individual attention. As one teacher said, "*My parent mentor takes my kids who would be the lowest readers out. Works with them one-on-one. They do the work when she's there.*" According to another teacher,

"*We all can use an extra set of hands, especially when half the kids are reading way below the norm. The parent mentor I had, I used her for reading. I had her take the students. She has the book, and she knows the assignment. She sits down with the students. These kids get the help they need.*"

Parents also provide many students with a different kind of adult relationship within the school, leading to more constructive engagement with their classes and subject matter. According to one parent,

"*To me being a parent mentor means being able to communicate with the students as well as the teachers. And when you're able to share some of the things that you know about the subjects, it seems to bring out a lot of good in a kid. I've noticed that in certain classrooms that I go to, the kids, they want to participate even more, even the ones that weren't even really doing well. The teachers notice how well they're making progress because they're interested, and I keep their interest going.*"

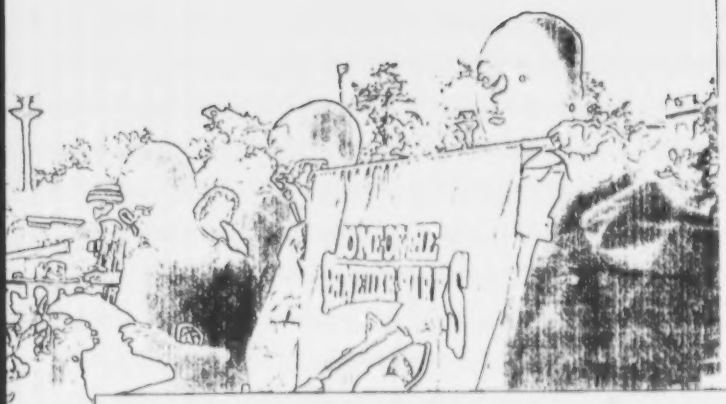
A teacher survey conducted by LSNA staff in 1999 reported that 71% of teachers identified improved discipline as an effect of having a parent mentor in their classrooms. As a part of mandatory reporting to the Annenberg Challenge, five schools also reported decreases in discipline referrals. Although they had wide disparity in the number of discipline referrals, all reported a downward trend. For example, one school had a surprisingly large number of referrals, but it went down 37% from 1,416 in 1996 to 885 in 1999. In another school, referrals went down from 66 in 1995-96 to 37 in 1998-1999, a drop partly attributed to losing its older students through elimination of upper grades, but also partly attributed to the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program.

Improving the Climate for Learning

After years of classroom-based collaboration between parents and teachers, LSNA's parent-dominated Education Committee has developed a "Respect for Children Campaign" and recruited more teachers to the committee. In addition to other activities, the members of this committee are working to change schools and classrooms so that the environment for learning becomes more positive. During the fall of 2000, parents on the committee approached the LSNA principals' group with the suggestion of having a joint parent/teacher professional development session on creating a positive climate for learning. As one of the committee members explained,

"*We are trying to do something about the respect of teachers for children, and on both sides. We don't want to pick out certain teachers. We don't want to get into arguments. We simply want to say that this is a serious problem.*"

During the winter of 2001, over 80 parents and teachers from the LSNA schools attended a joint professional development session. The session was a workshop in experiential learning, designed to help both parents and teachers understand what it feels like to be a child who experiences classroom authority that is arbitrary and unfair. Attendees rated the workshop very highly. LSNA has raised funds to hire the facilitator, a Mexican-born actor and educator, as a part-time staff member to develop additional workshops for parents and teachers.



Fourth Indicator Area: Leadership Development

The power of community organizing groups is created through the development of leaders. This indicator area is directly associated with building strong communities, because neighborhood-based leaders keep community organizing groups focused and moving forward on issues that have the highest priority for the community. Opportunities for leadership and leadership development characterize all aspects of LSNA's work in schools. One aspect of leadership development in LSNA consists of the *extensive opportunities for individual and family empowerment within LSNA's programs.* A second aspect of leadership development is LSNA's work in *identifying and training parents and community members to take on leadership roles* within the schools and LSNA. A third aspect is LSNA's work in *supporting civic engagement by parents and youth.*

Individual and Family Empowerment

All parent mentors set personal goals for themselves as part of their participation in the program. Often these include getting a G.E.D., learning English, getting a job, or attending college. All but a handful of the 840 parent mentor graduates over the years have gone on to job training programs, adult education classes, volunteer activities, or leadership roles in the school. Parent mentor graduates have also been hired in large numbers as classroom aides and in other paid paraprofessional positions. As discussed above in the section on social capital, parents consistently tell a story of personal transformation through their involvement in the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program.

As the teacher who coordinated the program at one school explained, *"The parent organizer does all things to have well informed parents in the school. She works with them in all areas—political, emotional, economic."* The assistant principal at the same school commented, *"I just can't tell you what a difference it has made in the lives of our parents."*

LSNA's Community Learning Centers create a safe and accessible environment for entire families to participate in educational and recreational programs. The centers offer homework assistance, adult education, cultural programming, and health services after school and in the evenings. The first center to open, Funston, graduates approximately fifty Spanish GED students a year. LSNA has the highest graduation rate for Spanish GED of all off-campus programs run by the Chicago City Colleges. LSNA is also collaborating with Chicago State University to offer full scholarships and a bilingual teacher certification program for forty-five parent mentors, teacher aides, and other Logan Square community members. This is an important extension of LSNA's work with parents, many of whom see the bilingual teacher certification program as an opportunity to build on the skills, interests, and commitment to improving the educational experience of Latino children that they first identified as parent mentors. In addition to its other education programs, LSNA works with schools to train parents in Family Reading, Family Math, and Character Development.

PARENT MENTOR OVERVIEW: SPRING 2001

Number of Parents Mentors: 114

75% of parent mentors are immigrants

44% of parent mentors have GEDs or high school degrees (US or foreign)

23% of parent mentors are in ESL classes

22% of parent mentors are in GED classes

10% of parent mentors are enrolled in college classes

Leadership Roles in the School

Parent mentor graduates commonly take leadership roles on LSCs and other legally-mandated committees such as the bilingual and principal selection committees. LSNA is active in recruiting and training parents for LSCs and LSNA schools typically have full slates or contested elections and high levels of voter turnout compared with the turnout at many other schools in Chicago. For example, in the last two elections one LSNA school had the highest number of LSC candidates in its district of fifty schools.

Parent mentor graduates have been instrumental in conducting community surveys to help get new community centers started. They also staff community centers and participate on the governing bodies of LSNA's four existing school-based community centers. They also form the backbone of other parent activities at LSNA schools such as parent patrols. In addition, parent mentor graduates and other LSNA leaders coordinate many literacy activities at their schools, including reading with children, conducting library card drives, and creating lending libraries for parents. Principals and parent organizers consistently report that parent mentors and parent mentor graduates form the majority of active parents in their schools.

One of LSNA's education leaders, Bonita, now an LSNA organizer, described her evolution as a leader in the Mozart School. She began coming into the school because she wanted to help with her daughter, who was in a special education class. The LSC president, who was also the chair of LSNA's Education Committee, *"saw me there everyday and pulled me into more activities,"* she explained. *"I ran for the LSC because I wanted more money for special education. We had to fight for it."* Bonita worked with LSNA leaders and organizers to develop her skills in chairing meetings, speaking in public, analyzing school budgets, and advocating for special education services. She told us, *"We brought in a nurse and three therapists. I also learned that the teachers have to take workshops in special ed."*

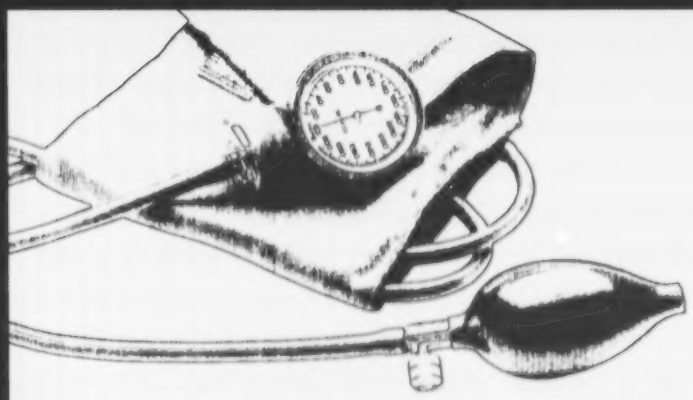
Bonita continued her involvement, working closely with the principal, other parents, and the school/community coordinator on a wide range of activities, including instituting the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program, securing funding for a lending library for parents, doing outreach for a community center, and continuing to advocate for students. Like many other parents who are active in their schools, Bonita has also become a leader within LSNA.

Increasing Civic Engagement

As parents become involved in their schools, they seek out new ways to remain active and build their leadership skills. An organizer's written reports tell how this happened at one school.

"At Mozart, the parents who surveyed residents for the Community Learning Center planning process came back from door-knocking excited, energized, frustrated, and with many stories to tell. Angry homeowners had complained of dirty alleys, disorderly empty lots, and unruly teens. Old ladies had invited them in for tea and unburdened themselves of their life stories. Strangers had offered to share their knowledge in the community center. Out of many such demands for reconnection, the idea of block organizing was reborn." IOANNA BROWN, LSNA REPORT TO MACARTHUR, 1999

"About ten women who participated in the CLC survey developed into a paid block club organizing team which still exists, though new members have been added as old ones got jobs or moved. This "Outreach Team" spent the first two years organizing block clubs and working on block issues (safety, rats) in the Mozart area. More recently, they have worked for LSNA on a variety of issues more widely in the neighborhood—passing out flyers for real estate tax workshops and zoning meetings, collecting 5,000 signatures on a petition for an immigration amnesty and 2,200 signatures for a campaign to expand family health insurance to low-income families. Most recently, they



have become an expert team in signing up families for state-provided health insurance."

JOANNA BROWN, MANUSCRIPT FOR THE MACARTHUR DOCUMENTATION PROJECT, 2001

Future Directions

LSNA's most recent Holistic Plan (May 2001) demonstrates that LSNA is continuing to build on its education work as first outlined in its original Holistic Plan (May 1994). The document also indicates some of the challenges facing the organization and new directions for education organizing. New directions addressed in LSNA's most recent Holistic Plan include an increased focus on teachers, issues of respectful school climate, and involving parent mentors in broader organizing, particularly around housing costs, gentrification, and health care. This section of the report looks at those new directions and also changes in the larger context that could affect LSNA's work in schools.

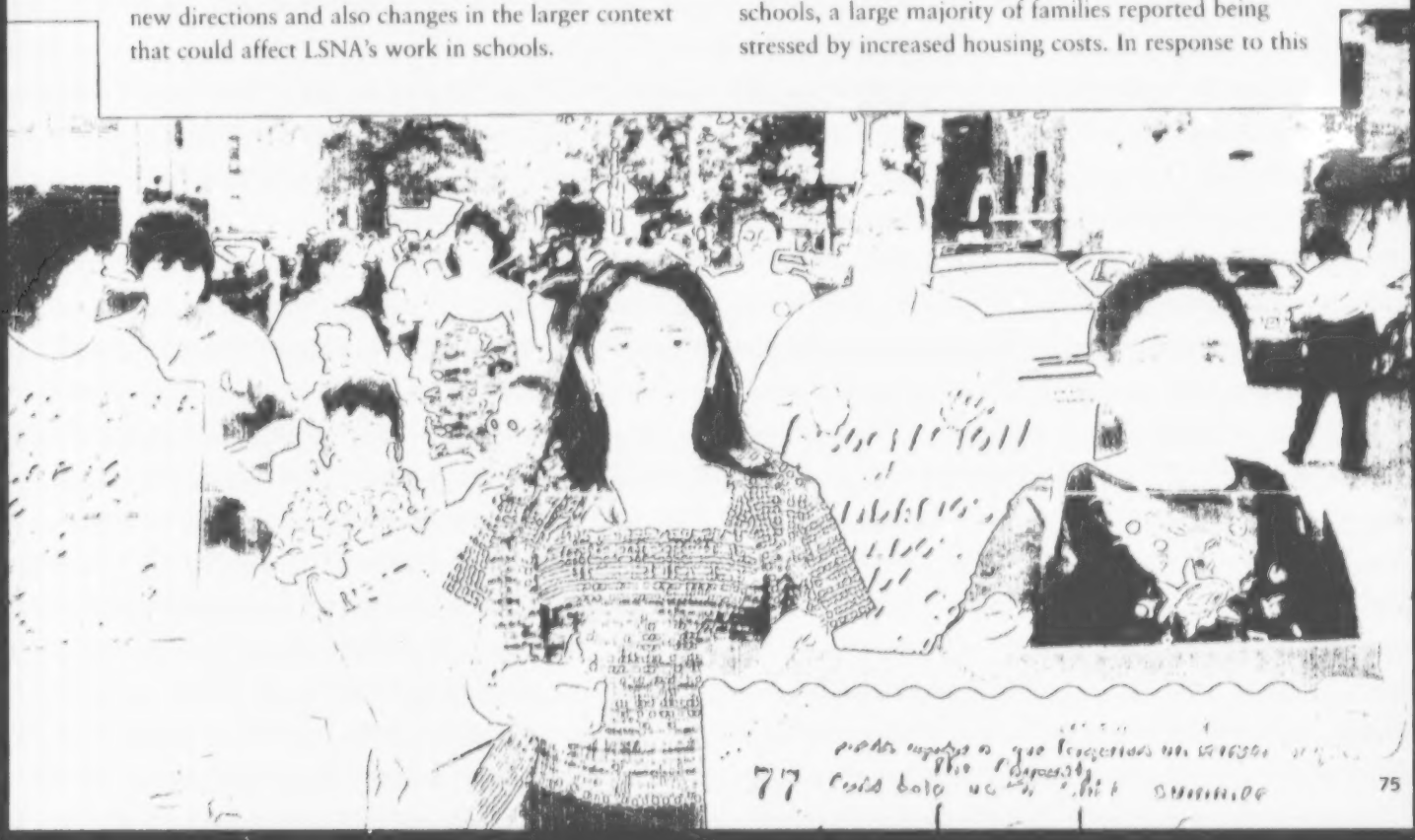
Continuation of the Central Elements of LSNA's Holistic Plan

The three school-related resolutions in the 2001 Holistic Plan continue to focus on the importance of building school/community collaboration. These resolutions build on the strength that LSNA has already demonstrated in developing the community's capacity to support its schools and the schools' capacity to support their community. The resolutions in the 2001 Plan continue to call for Parent-Teacher Mentor Programs, school-based Community Learning Centers, and development of parent leadership.

Challenges Addressed in the 2001 Holistic Plan

Perhaps the greatest current issue in Logan Square is the fact that low- and moderate-income people are being squeezed out of the neighborhood, as multiple forces (the building of high-cost housing, conversion of rental units to condos, and rising rents and housing prices) reduce the supply of affordable housing. As stated in the Plan, "development and rising housing prices have begun to threaten the diverse character of our neighborhood and the well-being of our families."

Public school families are among those most affected by displacement. Two of LSNA's schools each lost more than 100 students over the past year. In other schools, a large majority of families reported being stressed by increased housing costs. In response to this



crisis of displacement, LSNA has greatly strengthened its housing organizing. While continuing to organize through its Housing and Zoning committees, LSNA has also increased its effort to involve parent mentors in the housing issue. For example, during the fall of 2001, parent mentors in one school established a housing committee, started leafleting their neighborhoods, and planned additional meetings to address their next steps.

There are also other ways in which LSNA, as a multi-issue community organization, has been pressured to respond to the needs of its parent mentors and other public school families. Immigration and access to health care are two issues that emerged from women who first became active in LSNA's Parent-Teacher Mentor Program. The Holistic Plan's resolution on immigration was first incorporated into the plan in 2000, largely in response to parents' interest in the national campaign for a new amnesty. A new resolution about access to health care, introduced in May 2001, was driven by the fact that many of the parent mentors had no health insurance. On both of these issues, LSNA has joined with metropolitan organizations to organize for policy changes and to provide services to its members. Many of the people active on both issues came out of the Parent-Teacher Mentor Programs.

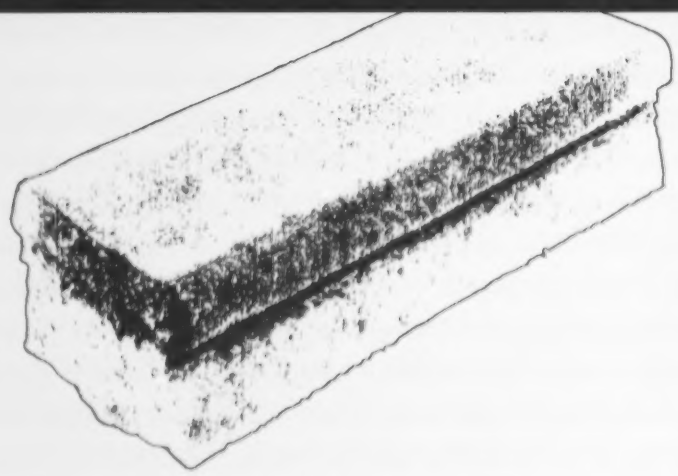
Action Steps of the 2001 Holistic Plan indicate several other areas in which LSNA's work with schools is continuing to evolve:

- *Attention to maintaining the close connection of Community Learning Centers to the needs and aspirations of the community.* According to the plan, LSNA pledges to "assist the community centers with leadership development, strategic planning, program development, and organizing; to re-survey [three] Community Learning Centers; and to establish a process to evaluate Community Learning Centers' programs and activities." LSNA staff and leaders report that even after community centers have been established, ongoing organizing is necessary to make sure that they stay flexible, vibrant, and responsive to community needs and visions. As other groups look towards LSNA's Community Learning Centers as a model, it will be important for them to understand the underlying approach that makes the Community Learning Centers successful.
- *Increased focus on working with teachers and on improving school climate.* In 2001, LSNA pledges to "support [its ongoing] program to train parents and teacher aides as bilingual teachers [and to] train teachers on the goals and content of the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program to help them become better mentors to the parents. As part of its campaign to improve the climate for learning in Logan Square schools, the Education Committee is working closely with a new LSNA staff person on workshops for teachers, workshops for parents, and workshops

for teachers and parents together on issues of creative teaching methods and school climate. Another potential direction is an increased emphasis on high schools, as the children of LSNA's leaders move from the elementary and middle schools to high school. One of LSNA's major goals for next year is to develop a more extensive family literacy program in which teams of teachers and parent mentors would be trained to hold "Literacy Housemeetings" with families on how to read with their children. Thus, parents with extensive experience in the school would serve as "Literacy Ambassadors" to other families. LSNA is currently seeking funding for this effort.

Changes in the External Environment

In part because of its focus on collaboration and relationship-building, LSNA was able to maintain a productive relationship with the Chicago Board of Education and CEO Paul Vallas over the past six years. New leadership at the Board and at the Chicago Teacher's Union may open up new opportunities. LSNA's local work with teachers may be informed by its evolving relationship with the citywide teachers union. The new CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Arne Duncan, has stated his interest both in broader approaches to literacy and in strengthened school/community collaborations, and appears to seek broader collaborations with groups outside the Chicago Board of Education. New leadership at the



Chicago Teacher's Union is also exploring different ways of relating to the community.

In order to survive, LSNA's programs will most likely need a source of permanent, probably public, funding. The community centers have a base of federal funding for the next 2.5 years, but secure funding for the parent mentor program has been difficult to achieve since the end of the Annenberg funding in Chicago. Thus, it is particularly important that district administrators, community organizers, schools, and politicians are increasingly looking towards LSNA's programs as models for parent engagement and the development of community schools. LSNA's citywide relationships have potential implications for LSNA's funding base, for stabilizing its programs and for the evolution of its strategies for improving local schools.

Case Study:
NEW YORK ACORN

Prepared by

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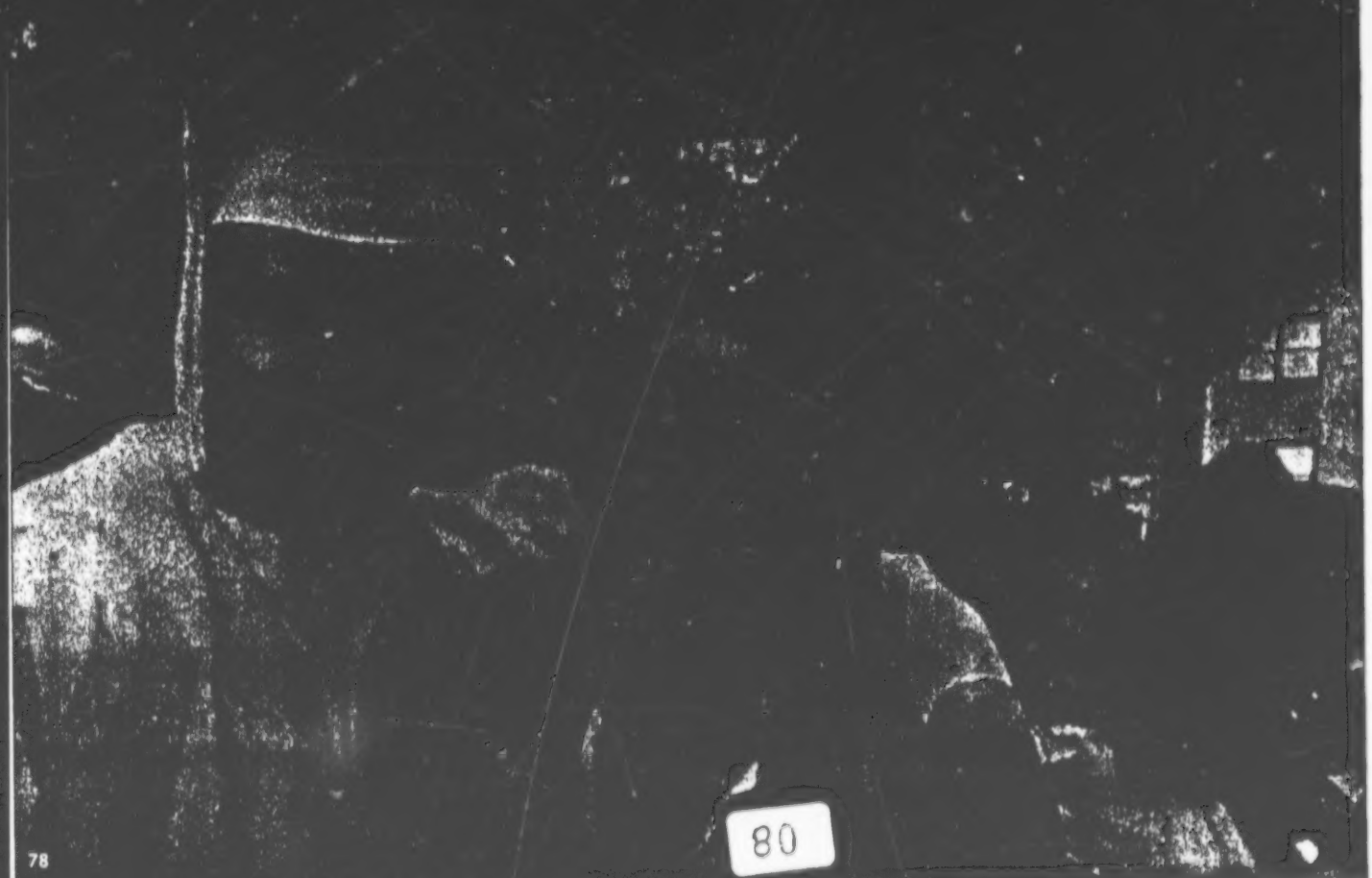

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Introduction to New York ACORN

"As a membership-based low-income organization that works in low-income neighborhoods, not for one single moment [have we] ever separated schools and community. You can no more separate schools from our membership than you can separate gender. Members have been students, do have kids, continue in education, schools are in their neighborhoods, there is no separation. They do not think of education in an abstract way." ORGANIZER

ACORN's twenty years of organizing in New York City gained it a strong reputation in the areas of housing and economic justice. However, local neighborhood organizing always surfaced education and schools as pressing concerns. When ACORN decided to build a focus on education organizing, it brought its considerable organizing expertise and relationships with key decision-makers to bear in this arena. In 1988, NY ACORN established a Schools Office, overseen by a citywide Education Committee and staffed by organizers dedicated to working on public education issues.

Just as in its organizing around housing, where ACORN worked at both the neighborhood and policy levels, its education work also proceeds on multiple levels simultaneously. ACORN addresses *local issues* as it develops neighborhood-based leadership to gain input and improvements in their neighborhood schools. ACORN has established *new schools* and is a partner in three autonomous high schools in Brooklyn and Washington Heights. ACORN also addresses *broader policy issues*. ACORN has carried out a series of *policy studies* coming from its members' experiences of inequities and have issued *reports* which form the basis of cross-district and citywide campaigns to bring about more equitable opportunities for low-income, minority children. ACORN works in collaboration with other *citywide* organizing groups around issues of overcrowding and class size, and in a campaign to improve the schools across three districts in the South Bronx. Recently, NY ACORN entered into an alliance with other powerful organizations to influence spending for public education at the *state* level.

The levels of ACORN's education organizing are interrelated and support one another. ACORN's success in establishing schools has earned it the credentials to push for change in city and state education policy. ACORN's policy reports have also earned it credentials in the education reform community, and built knowledge and confidence among its grass-roots constituency. This in turn has strengthened ACORN's power to support schools and make gains at the neighborhood level. ACORN's different areas of work are also mutually reinforcing. For example, ACORN's education work draws on relationships developed with city officials and politicians through its housing work.

ACORN is active in all eight indicator areas used in this project.[1] In this report, we relate ACORN's accomplishments in detail in four of the areas[2]. The four areas are:

- **EQUITY**
- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**
- **COMMUNITY POWER**
- **HIGH QUALITY CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

NOTES

1. For a chart representing ACORN's work in all eight indicator areas, see Appendix C. This chart is not comprehensive, but does illustrate the kinds of strategies ACORN has used in each area and examples of its achievements.

2. The data supporting the accomplishments of ACORN were gathered during site visits in spring and fall 2000. The report is not comprehensive of all ACORN has accomplished, but is intended to illustrate what documentation and measurement of its accomplishments might look like.

New York ACORN

ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, was founded in 1970. It emerged from the National Welfare Rights Organization and expanded its constituency to include moderate-income and working-poor families. According to its website, ACORN has grown to become "the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 100,000 member families organized into 500 neighborhood chapters in forty cities across the country." ACORN is a multi-issue organization whose work, both nationally and at the local level, centers around affordable housing, living wages for low-wage workers, increasing investment by banks and governments in low-income communities, and improving public schools. ACORN's approach includes "direct action, negotiation, legislation, and voter participation." Funding comes from annual dues from member families, fundraising events, and foundation grants. ACORN members participate in a national convention every other year that focuses on a particular issue of interest to the organization. The Philadelphia convention in June 2000 focused on predatory lending.

New York ACORN was founded in 1981. Its membership comes from across the city, primarily from neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens, the South Bronx, and Washington Heights/Harlem. Its over 22,000 members are a cross section of those neighborhoods, mostly African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Puerto Rican, and Dominican. Its members are residents in half of the thirty-two New York City community school districts.

The Schools Office of New York ACORN was founded in 1988 to forward members' growing interest in education issues. The staff of the Schools Office consists of an organizer assigned to each of the three ACORN High Schools and two full-time senior staff who support the work of the organizers. The Schools Office is responsible for the ACORN High Schools as well as the citywide campaigns. Other ACORN staff members also support these wider campaigns. A citywide committee of parents provides oversight to the Schools Office. NY ACORN as a whole is governed by an Executive Committee. New York ACORN shares its Brooklyn office with the National ACORN Schools Office.

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The Context of Education Organizing in New York City

New York City is the largest school system in the country, with almost 1,200 schools and 1.1 million students. New York schools are governed through an evolving and often highly politically charged mix of decentralized and centralized authority (see box). The sheer size and complexity of the school system in New York City challenges the ingenuity of organizers to identify points of entry.

Authority over the schools is divided between the community school boards and the chancellor. When the districts were created, there was a deliberate attempt to make them diverse, in order to avoid the dominance of any one ethnic or racial group. In some districts, competing interests add to the challenge of organizing to improve schools.

Another challenge to organizing is the high turnover in district leadership at all levels, but particularly at the top. Contributing to chancellor turnover have been clashes with two-term Mayor Guiliani, a strong proponent of centralized control, privatization, and vouchers.

While many community school districts are quite diverse, highly segregated residential patterns in New York City result in other districts being almost entirely made up of low-income African-American and/or Latino students. The city also presents contrasts in wealth, particularly between Manhattan and the other boroughs. The community school districts also reflect this uneven distribution of resources and investments. In many of the poorest and racially/ethnically isolated neighborhoods, schools experience serious overcrowding, larger class size, more difficulty recruiting experienced and certified teachers, fewer materials, more deteriorated facilities, and less effective principal leadership. Efforts to use what funds there are to relieve overcrowding and reduce class size are confounded by the scarcity of affordable space and the costs of improving existing facilities and building new ones. In the past year, citizens groups and legislators have challenged convoluted state funding formulas that result in lower per pupil expenditures in New York City than in its surrounding suburban communities.

There have been two (sometimes competing) trends in school reform in New York City over the last decade. On the one hand, an approach of providing options within the public school system has spawned a significant number of small autonomous schools and schools within schools. The small schools are often formed in partnership with community-based organizations or other kinds of non-profit partners. The Annenberg Challenge investment of $25 million in New York City endorsed this strategy when it funded the New York Networks for School Renewal (NYNSR), a partnership of four groups dedicated to establishing and supporting small schools and public school choice. NYNSYR, whose goal was to establish a "critical mass" of small schools in New York City, claims more than 140 such programs. Most of these programs are recognized as autonomous, but still under the Central Board of Education's auspices. Relatively new charter legislation has made it possible for some of these schools and for new schools to be established outside the system. This process is just beginning. Other options within the New York City system are gifted programs and special admission high schools. Students can apply to gifted programs within their neighborhood schools or they can get variances to attend these

NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The New York City school system is governed by a seven-member Central Board of Education which includes an additional non-voting student representative appointed by the Board. Borough presidents appoint five of the voting members, and the mayor appoints the other two.

The Central Board hires the chancellor. In recent years, there has been rapid turnover in the chancellorship. There have been four chancellors since 1990: Joseph A. Fernandez (1990-1993), Ramon C. Cortines (1993-1995), Rudolph F. Crew (1995-2000), and Harold O. Levy (2000-present).

The school system is divided into 32 community school districts, each with an elected board that oversees elementary and junior high schools. Each community school board hires its own superintendent. There are nine high school districts with superintendents appointed by the chancellor. There is also a "Chancellor's District," which includes schools from across the city identified as low performing. Chancellor's District schools receive additional supports to improve teaching and learning.

The structure of control of the education system has been debated, with the former and current mayor favoring stronger mayoral control.

programs from outside the area. ACORN's policy studies have pointed up the under-representation of African-American and Latino students in the gifted programs and special admissions high schools.

The other trend in school reform has been towards standards and accountability. This trend is strengthened by the state's abandoning of the two-tier system of Regents and regular diplomas, so that all students must earn the more rigorous Regents diploma in order to graduate. Reports on passing rates on the Regents in the past year have shown that New York City lags behind the state as a whole; both rural and urban districts are far behind suburban districts. During his term, Chancellor Crew pushed testing, standards and accountability, an end to social promotion, and required summer school for students with low test scores. To address the district's lowest-performing schools, he created a special "Chancellor's District," which provides extra resources and services to about forty schools. This focus on school and student performance has heightened the public's concerns about students' performance on the tests and drawn attention to the issue of what schools and students need to be able to do to meet the new standards.

Schools, Policy, and Organizing

As noted above, New York ACORN works on multiple tracks and levels, each reinforcing the other. In addition, early efforts provided lessons that helped ACORN to sharpen and refine its approach to education organizing.

Early Efforts and Lessons Learned

ACORN established the Schools Office in 1988 to coordinate the local work it was already doing through its neighborhood organizing. One of ACORN's first strategies to address the education issues that were coming up at the neighborhood level was to encourage members to run for community school boards. The effort was successful in winning seats—seven of twelve members who ran succeeded in getting elected to five boards—but it did not provide the kind of influence ACORN hoped for. For one thing, ACORN leaders were frustrated in their attempts to get community concerns on the local board's agendas. They found the boards more engaged in assigning contracts and hiring than in changing educational policy and improving schools. Furthermore, the local district level was not a place they could solve many of the problems they cared about, such as class size and teacher quality, because the solutions could only come from above. ACORN came to see the local boards as a "mid-level bureaucracy," and not a fruitful place to expend their energies. Nevertheless, leadership development was a significant positive outcome, with some of ACORN's strongest leaders emerging from the group that had won local board offices. As a result, ACORN decided to dedicate itself to a strategy of parent education and leadership development at the neighborhood level and this strategy is ongoing.

The first new schools that ACORN developed came out of neighborhood organizing in the early 1990s. As a result of dissatisfactions with their children's school experience, parents in Far Rockaway Queens worked to open the Rockaway New School, a K-6 unit within PS (Public School) 183. The school opened in 1991. Parents were involved in determining the curriculum, and by all accounts the school was successful. Parents were very satisfied, and the teachers who had designed and staffed the school were highly invested. Nonetheless, keeping the school going proved to be a challenge because its status as a school within a school required ongoing support from the principal and local district superintendent. Parents and teachers eventually lost the struggle for continuing support and recognition for the Rockaway New School when the local district assigned an unfriendly principal to PS 183 and a corruption investigation diverted attention at the district and local board level. From that experience, ACORN concluded that the New School's lack of autonomy made it difficult for ACORN to have a continued role and for the school to maintain its distinctive character.

In 1992, parents in Flatbush were concerned about their children being bused to faraway schools because the overcrowding in their own "zone" was so severe that placement in neighborhood schools was "frozen." At first, parents expressed concern primarily about safety on the bus, but through research they learned that the overcrowding in their neighborhood entitled them to demand a new school, which opened in September 1993 as PS 245. ACORN's involvement in obtaining and planning the new school was significant. Unlike the Rockaway New School, PS 245 was not a school within a school, but a regular New York City public school. Once the school opened, however, ACORN had no formal role

there, and after being instrumental in its establishment, its influence waned. Reflecting on the lesson learned from PS 245, an ACORN organizer told us, "PS 245 taught us that, in fact, once you have won, now your work begins. You need to keep the school accountable...keep organizing."

Network of New Autonomous Schools

While PS 245 had begun to relieve overcrowding and raise school quality at the elementary and middle school levels, ACORN members had limited access to strong high school alternatives. In 1992, ACORN members asked then-Chancellor Fernandez to open four small high schools in Brooklyn. At this time, the small schools movement in New York City was emerging, along with the precedent for community partners to shape programs. ACORN hoped that having a more formal partnership with the high schools than with the schools established through ACORN's earlier efforts would lead to a more permanent and sustainable program. They organized public actions, culminating in a rally of 1,500 ACORN members in early 1993 where then-Mayor Dinkins, the School Board president, and the deputy chancellor committed to opening the four schools. ACORN kept up the pressure to get all agreements through the two subsequent Chancellors.

While the Central Board of Education finally gave its blessing to ACORN starting the new schools, it offered little support in actually getting the schools up and running. ACORN members found the space for the new schools and worked with realtors, architects, and developers to make them a reality. As part of the process, ACORN members visited successful schools, participated in training, and met to plan the program. It took four years before the first ACORN high school opened.

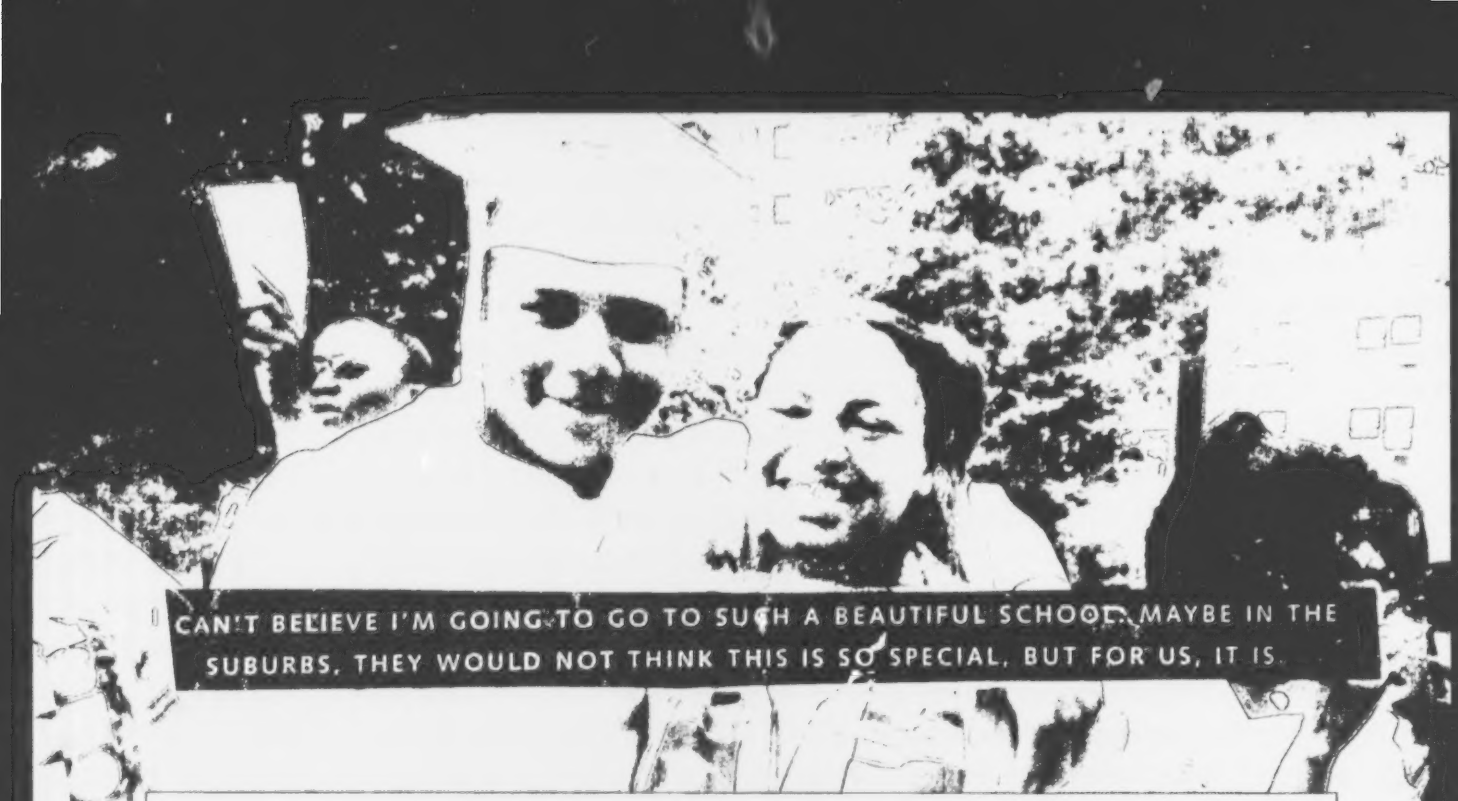
Establishing ACORN Community High School

The roots of ACORN's work to establish new schools grew out of its neighborhood organizing, where school quality is a pressing concern of its membership. In 1992, ACORN members challenged then-Chancellor Fernandez to address the lack of access to high quality high school alternatives in their neighborhoods; they asked him to commit to letting them open four small high schools in Brooklyn. Fernandez agreed to ACORN's demand for the schools, initiating a process of negotiation and design that took four years before the first school, ACORN Community High School (ACHS), opened its doors.

One step in the process of setting up a school is a memorandum of understanding, negotiated with one of the "superintendencies," units of the New York City schools decentralized governance structure. The early 1990s was a time when the city's small schools movement, led largely by educators, was taking shape. Fernandez had set up a Superintendency for Alternative High Schools to handle the wave of proposals for small schools and to negotiate the "memoranda of understanding." It became apparent that ACORN's would be caught in the logjam of proposals to the Alternative Superintendency. To speed up the process, the group turned to a local high school jurisdiction, the Brooklyn and Staten Island Superintendency (BASIS).

The position of Chancellor in New York turned over three times during this four-year period. Keeping the momentum going was a challenge. ACORN was able to draw on relationships previously developed with school board members with whom they had worked in past housing campaigns, who provided continuity and support throughout the period. When things slowed down, ACORN staged a rally in which they turned out 1,500 members as impetus to maintain forward motion.

Members met with school district officials to hammer out the details of the report and they visited other schools that could serve as a model. Members also attended evening meetings in which education experts introduced them to curriculum and pedagogy theory and where they worked to develop a vision and plans for the school. One ACORN member said, *"I went to so many meetings, every night, I almost lost my husband."* Coming out of this self-education process, the members envisioned a school that would have a *"commitment to high educational standards, innovative pedagogical practice oriented around themes of social change and social justice, and a genuinely democratic governance system with strong community and parent involvement."* (from ACORN documents)



"I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M GOING TO GO TO SUCH A BEAUTIFUL SCHOOL. MAYBE IN THE SUBURBS, THEY WOULD NOT THINK THIS IS SO SPECIAL, BUT FOR US, IT IS.

To hasten the progress of the ACHS memorandum of understanding, ACORN members began looking for a building that could house the school. They located a former warehouse in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn and chose an architect to design a school that would reflect their vision for the program. The design included a dance studio, a science lab, a computer room, and a spacious library, a building where *"the classrooms, not the administrative offices, had the best views of the city."* (ACORN member)

ACORN realized from past experience that the School Construction Authority could also present obstacles both to the renovations they wanted and ultimately to obtaining the memorandum of understanding. So they again turned to a relationship they had formed through their work in developing housing. A developer they had worked with before was willing to put up his own money to renovate the building in exchange for a fifteen-year lease from the School Board. In this way, they avoided the School Construction Authority and obtained a final memorandum of understanding.

Not only were ACORN members involved in getting the doors of ACHS open, they also participated in hiring staff. ACORN members, with the support of the BASIS Superintendent, participated in hiring the "Project Director," the administrator appointed for a one-year term to get a new small school up and running. Later, they also participated in hiring the permanent administrator. From these experiences, they learned about the challenges of staffing and discovered that it takes time to develop a working relationship. One ACORN member described the Project Director as resistant to the group's vision. *"She didn't understand the type of curriculum we wanted. We didn't want chalk and talk, we wanted children to interact with each other and an integrated curriculum. ... We wanted to hear noise in our classrooms because that would mean that the children were discussing the material."* From the beginning, ACORN organizers and members worked to involve all parents in holding the school accountable. As one parent explained, *"We would try to get them [parents] interested, and to understand their rights, that the principal is accountable to you, to your child and to her staff."*

The current administrator has been in place since year two. An ACORN high school principal faces the dilemma of having to respond both to the Board and to ACORN parents and members, but the principal and ACORN have endeavored to develop an effective working relationship. The principal has come to see ACORN as an ally, and ACORN has learned to appreciate the tensions she manages and where it makes sense to compromise. A member told of how parents convinced the principal that ACORN was her ally. When the principal invoked school board rules as an obstacle, they assured her, *"That's why we are here. We can deal with the board. ... We worked really, really hard to get this school. ... Yes, we're made up of low- and moderate-income families, but we are fighters. It has nothing to do with where you come from but how hard you're willing to fight for it."* ACORN organizers continue to refine ACORN's role as it works with the school's constituents, including students and teachers, to encourage communication and democratic participation.

On the day ACHS opened, a member of the first class said, *"I can't believe I'm going to go to such a beautiful school. Maybe in the suburbs, they would not think this is so special, but for us (in Brooklyn), it is."* This young woman graduated in 2000 with an average over 80, more than 20 points higher than her average when she entered high school. Her mother attributed it to her daughter's close relationship with her teachers.

There are currently three high schools in the ACORN schools network. Two are in Brooklyn. ACORN Community High School (ACHS) opened in Crown Heights, Brooklyn in 1996 with a 9th grade class. The first graduates finished in Spring 2000. The second Brooklyn high school in the ACORN network, and the second of the four promised for Brooklyn, was approved in 1996 as the ACORN High School for Social Justice (SOJO), to be located in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn. This school opened in 1999 in temporary quarters in the Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn.

ACORN became involved in a third high school in 1996 when two teachers from Bread & Roses Integrated Arts High School approached them for help in securing a space after their proposal had been approved as a New Visions school. After a courtship in which ACORN members learned about the school and the founding teachers agreed to incorporate the social justice theme, ACORN set up a series of meetings with school district officials that led to securing a building as well as requested facilities and equipment. Bread & Roses opened in Washington Heights in 1997.

In 1994, ACORN joined with the key New York groups advocating for the creation of small schools to form New York Networks for School Renewal (NYNSR). As noted earlier, the mission of NYNSR was to expand education options for New York City parents by creating a critical mass of small schools, both by supporting those already existing and by creating additional ones. The early planners were three established New York City nonprofits that had been involved in school restructuring and in facilitating principal- and teacher-initiated small schools. With ACORN's track record in starting small schools from a grassroots base, it was able to gain entry into this major school reform initiative, bringing to the effort its reputation as representing the interests of the city's low-income, mostly minority and immigrant children.

Policy Reports

A series of studies that document inequities in the New York City schools grew out of the contrasting experiences of two ACORN members in Far Rockaway. When a minority parent and a white parent compared notes on what they were told by school officials when they inquired about the programs that were available at their neighborhood elementary schools, they became concerned that their unequal treatment was a sign of systemic discrimination that limited options for minority and low-income students. They studied the issue systematically using a fair housing testing method, and in 1996 released the first *Secret Apartheid* report, *A Report on Racial Discrimination Against Black and Latino Parents and Children in the New York City Public Schools*, which showed that the experiences of the Rockaway parents were repeated all over the city. The study found significant differences in the information available to minority versus white parents, especially information about gifted programs starting in kindergarten that track students into magnet and other special programs at higher grade levels.

Secret Apartheid II: Race, Regents, and Resources, which came out the next year, followed up to further determine if schools were living up to mandated policies which required provision of consistent information to all families. It also took on the question of whether students have equal access to the rigorous coursework

NEW YORK NETWORKS FOR SCHOOL RENEWAL

In addition to ACORN, the member partners of the NYNSR are the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), the Center for Educational Innovation (the CEI), and New Visions for Public Schools. The goals of NYNSR are: to support the 140 small public schools in its network; to encourage school networks, to advance the concept of a "Learning Zone" where schools are exempt from some system requirements; to influence city and state reform initiatives in the areas of school budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment, and to increase funding for public education.

SELECTED FINDINGS OF SECRET APARTHEID II

- More than half of the students attending the two elite "science" high schools come from three community school districts.
- The districts sending the most students to the two science high schools are more racially and ethnically mixed and have higher median income than those that send the least.
- Six districts together send less than one percent of the students and six others send only one percent each.
- Districts with greater availability of advanced math courses in middle school have a greater likelihood of sending students to the magnet high schools.

necessary to prepare them for the newly required Regents exam. *Secret Apartheid III: Follow-Up to Failure* came out in 1998, and documented how gifted programs sort students by race and ethnicity, despite the fact that federal funding targeted for these programs is intended to reduce segregation within schools.

Policy Work: District, City, and Statewide

ACORN is involved in two coalitions that address education equity and quality. The Parent Organizing Consortium (POC) includes a number of parent organizing groups across the city, and has pushed for increased and more equitable state spending for class-size reduction and school construction, as well as for raising teacher quality. More recently, ACORN and New York Citizen Action initiated a statewide coalition, the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), to lobby the state legislature for more funding. The core group of Alliance partners includes: three teachers' unions, with New York City's United Federation of Teachers the largest among them; New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy; and the Fiscal Policy Institute, based in Albany. According to a key Alliance leader, the Alliance focuses on needs which are widely agreed on—books, lower class size, qualified teachers, early childhood education, and decent facilities.

The South Bronx School Improvement Campaign, working across three local districts, is another effort aimed at changing policy on a broader level. Coming out of its local organizing in the South Bronx and parents' dissatisfaction with the quality of schools in the area, ACORN developed a campaign with the assistance of NYU's Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP). IESP's research showed that the schools in three community school districts in the South Bronx were among the worst in the city in terms of student achievement and teacher quality.

ACORN's report, *No Silver Bullet: A Call for Doing What Works*, which was released in May 1999, focused on the South Bronx in corroborating the findings of the *Secret Apartheid* studies about inadequate opportunities in the New York City schools for low-income, minority students. For example, the report pointed out that only one member of the Class of 1998 in all thirteen of the South Bronx high schools earned a Regents diploma after four years, and fewer than one eighth grader in thirteen had the opportunity to take Regents level coursework.

As a kick off to the campaign to improve South Bronx schools, the report called on the chancellor to establish a "South Bronx Improvement Zone" for three of the community school districts, and to use proven curricula and raise teacher quality. The elements of the campaign, outlined in the report include: an incentive program to attract experienced teachers, increased spending for professional development, an incentive program to attract skilled and motivated principals, implementation of the Success for All reading program, reduced class size, an extended day academic program, and a new ACORN High School in the Bronx. ACORN partnered with the United Federation of Teachers in calling for improvements that relate to teaching and teacher recruitment. Parent leaders succeeded in meeting with Chancellor Levy, and gained a commitment for a pilot of the program.

Indicators and Measures

ACORN is active in every indicator area. This report, however, discusses ACORN's activity in four of the eight indicator areas: equity, leadership development, community power, and high quality curriculum and instruction. We selected these areas because they were particularly salient in both the interviews we conducted and the events we observed during site visits. Archival documentation, including reports and newspaper clippings, supports these as areas of ACORN's accomplishment.

The discussion begins with ACORN's accomplishments in the area of equity. A focus on equity pervades ACORN's work, which has included bringing new facilities and resources into neglected neighborhoods, getting policy changed to increase access to gifted and magnet programs, sustaining the call for equity, and building political and public will to increase spending for public schools.

Next we examine ACORN's efforts in terms of leadership development. ACORN looks at all of its work as an opportunity for developing leadership skills and a sense of efficacy among teachers, students, and parents. One distinctive feature of ACORN's leadership development is that it works directly with high school students and youth.[3] Evidence of ACORN's accomplishments

NOTES

3. In addition to working with students in the ACORN high schools, ACORN works with the younger children of adult ACORN members through ACORN Junior.

in this area include: creating settings for leadership development; ACORN members' gains in knowledge about education and school improvement; and ACORN members' increasing sense of their ability to influence others and bring about change.

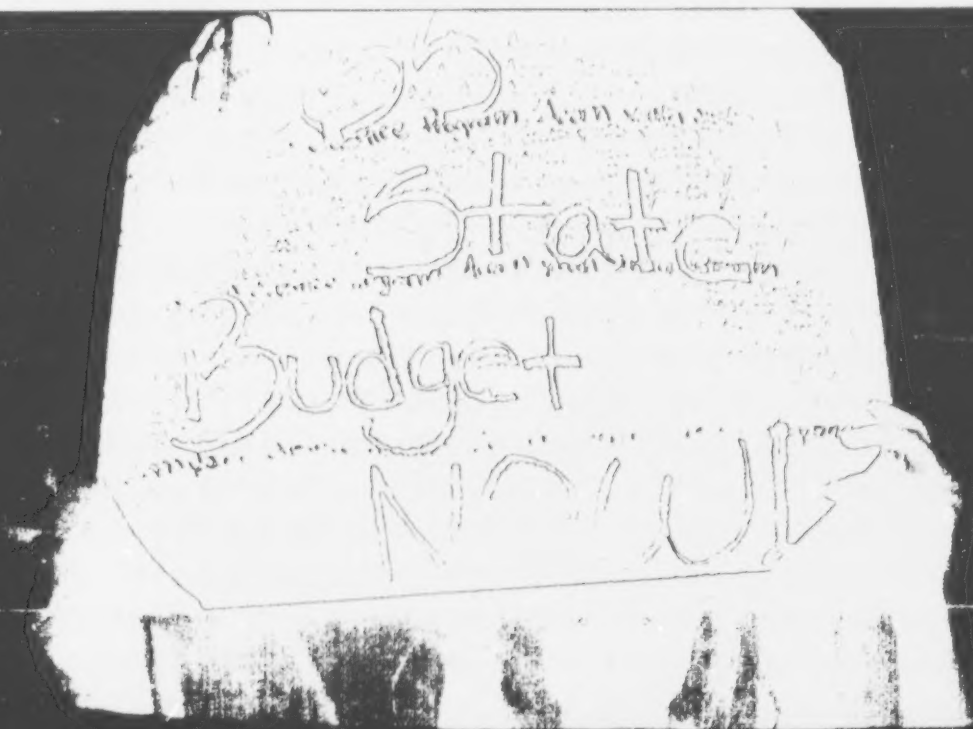
The third indicator area discussed here is community power. Evidence of ACORN's power include: widespread recognition that ACORN represents the voices of parents and community members; public recognition of ACORN's "education credentials"; public officials' responsiveness to ACORN's demands; and ACORN's ability to cut through bureaucracy to move plans forward or protect its schools from interference. ACORN has been able to build powerful partnerships, play a major role in shaping the education reform agenda, and gain "a seat at the table" as a leader among education organizing groups.

Finally, the report looks at ACORN's work in the area of strengthening instruction and curriculum. In this area, ACORN has brought attention to the lack of challenging coursework and issues of teacher quality in many schools. Through its high schools, ACORN has developed curriculum and activities with the potential to engage students and teach them about the political and social environments of their communities. ACORN's extensive work at the high school level distinguishes it from other education organizing groups, which, until recently, have mainly focused on elementary schools. ACORN has also brought about a focus on reading achievement in South Bronx schools.

First Indicator Area: Equity

"They [ACORN] have a proclivity for organizing the poorest of the poor. . . They really do struggle at the most desperate of situations, which is something that I always appreciated about them and a distinction that should be made." EXTERNAL PARTNER

Pushing for schools and the larger system to create the conditions for more equitable outcomes for students underlies all of the work of New York ACORN, and the quote above is one of many which demonstrate the degree to which politicians, school system officials,



EVIDENCE OF ACORN'S POWER INCLUDES WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION THAT ACORN REPRESENTS THE VOICES OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

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and school reformers recognize ACORN's commitment to equity. In this report we will discuss four measures of ACORN's accomplishments in the area of equity: *bringing new facilities and resources to low-income neighborhoods; obtaining policy changes to increase access to gifted and special admissions programs; raising public awareness and sustaining attention to inequitable conditions; and building political will for increasing equity in public schools.*

Bringing New Facilities and Resources to Low-income Neighborhoods

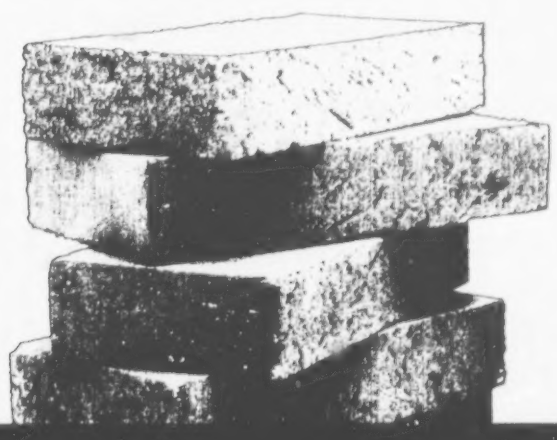
"This was a high school choice system . . . where kids were supposed to be able to choose from the over 200 schools in the city that are available outside of the zoned school. What was happening was that most ACORN members' kids would put down eight schools they wanted to attend and would be rejected by all of them and then told to go the zoned school, most of which were not doing terrific work with kids." FORMER ACORN SCHOOLS OFFICE STAFF MEMBER

In establishing schools, ACORN added options for students in neighborhoods where programs of high quality are generally lacking. The creation of PS245 not only brought new resources into Flatbush, but it also addressed overcrowding in the zone. ACORN Community High School and The High School for Social Justice provide sound alternatives for low-income parents and students in the Brooklyn's Crown Heights and Bushwick neighborhoods, which are mostly minority (African-American, Caribbean, Latino) and low-income. The Bread & Roses Integrated Arts High School in Washington Heights serves a largely Dominican population in upper Manhattan. In addition to the two new high schools in Brooklyn, ACORN is also working toward obtaining a commitment to open a high school in the Bronx and members have been looking for a space.

These schools not only add viable educational options in the neighborhoods where ACORN members live, but also bring new physical resources in the form of buildings, books, and adequate facilities. In order to establish these schools, ACORN parent leaders themselves had to find the buildings, push for renovations that support their educational vision, and keep an eye on renovations and equipment purchases to assure that promises were kept.

It is a challenge to find suitable buildings in New York's tight real estate market. ACORN members have insisted on including important features such as comfortable libraries, spaces for movement and exercise, and science labs. ACORN's role in the Bread and Roses Integrated Arts High School, for example, involved pushing the Board of Education for the facilities and equipment the school needed to carry out its arts and social justice theme. After parents went to Board of Education meetings and persisted in their demands, officials agreed to outfit a library and to change the computer order from Gateway to Macintosh, which saved money while getting the equipment necessary for the arts and graphic design components of the curriculum. The principal acknowledged that without ACORN's help, the school would not have won these battles.

The South Bronx School Improvement Campaign is also aimed at issues of equity, including bringing in new resources and increasing the access of low-income children to high-quality education. In calling for the formation of a South Bronx School Improvement Zone, ACORN pointed to the history of neglect of the South Bronx schools, which has resulted in their being among the lowest performing in the city. As the Bronx ACORN organizers and parent leaders told us, Bronx residents see their neighborhood as a neglected, forgotten part of the city with the worst schools and services. When test scores were released in 1998, parents saw just how poorly their schools were doing and that spurred the development of the Campaign. ACORN gained the



attention of the chancellor with the report *No Silver Bullet,* which documented the extent of neglect in the South Bronx schools and through rallies organized with the support of the Bronx ACORN office. As a result, the chancellor has met with ACORN leaders twice and has agreed to pilot the agenda laid out in *No Silver Bullet* in some fifteen schools in the three Bronx districts. While the pilot falls somewhat short of what the report asked for, it still has great potential to demonstrate the value of giving more resources and attention to these schools.

Obtaining Policy Change to Increase Access to Gifted and Magnet Programs

The three *Secret Apartheid* studies document in clear terms how, in the New York City school system, tracking starts in kindergarten (when children are most likely to be admitted to gifted programs) and continues all the way through to middle school (where there is limited availability of Regents-level math courses, which are necessary for success on admissions tests for the elite high schools). The result is pronounced under-representation of African-American and Latino students in gifted and magnet programs.

The *Secret Apartheid* reports are written in an accessible and direct way, with the aim of presenting information so that parents and community members can clearly understand the systemic nature of the problems they experience personally. The reports attracted abundant media attention, which may have had as great an impact through building public awareness of the inequities as through raising attention within the system. The media coverage included a *New York Times* editorial on newly appointed Chancellor Rudy Crew that was largely positive, but underscored the charges made in *Secret Apartheid* and called on the new chancellor for action.

Chancellor Crew did publicly acknowledge the reports' charges. However, his response was only a start in dealing with the issues, and ACORN had to be persistent in holding him and the board of education accountable for follow-through. In direct response to the first *Secret Apartheid* report, Chancellor Crew sought to take action on admissions practices for elementary-level gifted programs. He called for a system-wide survey of gifted programs (the first to be conducted in ten years), drafted new standards for admission for special kindergarten and other gifted programs, and promised to set up a task force to examine the effects of tracking.

The report also caught the attention of the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights Policies and resulted in a consent decree forcing the district to take action to reduce discriminatory practices related to informing parents of gifted programs. As a result of the consent decree, the Board signed an agreement committing itself to undertake three measures system-wide to provide information more consistently. Each school would designate someone knowledgeable about the school's gifted programs to handle parent inquiries, prominently post signs outlining academic programs in the school, and train security personnel regarding parents' right of access. In addition, the chancellor convened district superintendents to inform them about the new policies and required them to do a comprehensive survey of gifted programs in the schools in their districts. As ACORN characterizes these steps in the third report, these would be "concrete measures to democratize access to information about the schools and their programs."

One-year later, in *Secret Apartheid II,* ACORN followed up to see if the system was carrying out the newly mandated policies. The results of the follow-up were disappointing; there had been virtually no change from 1996 to 1997 in the way schools treated minority parents. Other commitments, such as creating a task force to examine tracking, were not honored either. Nonetheless, the district superintendents' surveys made school personnel aware of the de facto admissions policies and forced them to consider how these practices measured up in light of Office of Civil Rights standards for equitable access.

ACORN also succeeded in getting the Board to make public the information gathered in the system-wide survey of gifted programs. After the survey was completed, the chancellor initially refused to release the results, but ACORN, supported by a pro bono legal team, forced the district to do so. The Board's survey was incomplete because it failed to gather certain crucial information about the distribution of students by race and ethnicity, but the information collected did provide ACORN with a basis for the second *Secret Apartheid* report, which showed the disproportionately low representation of African-American and Latino children in gifted programs.

Furthermore, ACORN was able to put pressure on the Board by bringing a legal suit based on the premise that the federal monies for these programs were intended for reducing the isolation of minority children and their use in support of segregated programs violated the intent of the law.

As a result of the *Secret Apartheid* studies' drawing attention to the role magnet programs have in school segregation, the city comptroller agreed to consider an audit of New York City's use of federal funds designated for magnet programs—funds intended to further school integration. If the audit shows inequities, state legislators and city education officials will be under pressure to respond.

Also as a result of the *Secret Apartheid* studies and ACORN's organizing following those studies, the Board invested in curriculum and programs to increase access of minority students to gifted and special programs in the elementary and junior high schools and to special admissions high schools. *Secret Apartheid II* showed that minority students' middle school coursework did not prepare them for the entrance exams for the selective high schools or for the work they would be expected to do there. In response to this evidence, the chancellor expanded the Math and Science Institute, a program designed to help prepare students to take the tests for admission to one of the three premier high schools. This program was originally set up under Chancellor Fernandez only at a Manhattan location that enrolled 300 students. After the release of *Secret Apartheid II*, Chancellor Crew "bumped up" the program, investing $8 million dollars to locate a Math and Science Institute in every borough in the city and to increase enrollment to 2,000. One future measure of ACORN's impact on equity will be a follow-up on the rates of admission to the selective high schools from borough Institutes, the representation of different community school districts, and any changes in the racial/ethnic makeup of the selective schools.

Whether the expansion of the Math and Science Institute is considered directly attributable to ACORN's work or not depends on whom one talks to. For Chancellor Crew, equity was a priority item on his list, and that may account in part for his responsiveness to the *Secret Apartheid* studies. However, there is a clear relationship between the release of the report and Crew's actions. ACORN has kept the pressure on, holding him and the larger system accountable for carrying out their commitments. While the numbers of students affected are small, given the size of the New York City system, the Board's increased investment in equalizing access represents a significant advance.

Also as a result of the *Secret Apartheid* work, ACORN members began an effort to encourage the three special admissions high schools to expand access by working with the junior high schools in nearby low-income neighborhoods. ACORN members sought meetings with the principals of the three schools to encourage them to find ways to increase enrollment of neighborhood students. Two of the special admissions schools were unresponsive, but ACORN members succeeded in meeting with the principal of Brooklyn Technical High School. The Brooklyn high schools superintendent agreed to set up a "corridor arrangement" between a number of neighborhood junior high schools and Brooklyn Tech that would increase the representation of low-income, minority students. It is too early to examine the results of Brooklyn Tech's efforts to work with nearby middle schools; however, an interim sign of progress might be an increase in the number of students taking advanced math in 8th grade.

Raising Public Awareness and Sustaining Attention to Inequities Over Time

The *Secret Apartheid* reports, along with *No Silver Bullet* and the ongoing South Bronx Campaign, have heightened community awareness of the widespread inequities within the New York City school system. As one of ACORN's outside partners told us, perhaps the most important outcome of the *Secret Apartheid* reports was to increase the awareness of low-income parents and students across the city that there are deeply entrenched inequalities. Parents learned that they have a right to information and to school programs with high expectations for their children's learning. By raising consciousness, ACORN builds the capacity and motivation of low- and moderate-income parents to fight for equity over the length of time it takes to make significant improvements. The head of the school system and the Central Board know that ACORN is not going away and will not turn away from these issues, although the pressure it applies may take different forms.

ACORN's actions also contribute to raising the awareness of regulatory agencies and of the public at large. ACORN's reports and campaigns, and resultant legal suits, have gained widespread media attention and have helped to place issues of equity in education higher on the public agenda over an extended period of time.

Building Political Will for Increasing Equity in Public Schools

One of the unique contributions of community organizing to increasing equity in the public schools is creating the political will for elected and school officials to take action. As mentioned above, equity was definitely on Chancellor Crew's agenda when he came to the New York City schools. However ACORN has played a crucial role in keeping public attention focused on issues of equity, both through its studies and through actions taken as a result of the studies. This has maintained pressure on the chancellor, on principals of the special admissions high schools, and on city and state officials to keep equity issues high on the agenda.

Many of the school improvements that ACORN members are asking for—smaller class size, reduction in overcrowding, new facilities—are dependent on increased city and state funding. This has led ACORN to seek ways to have an impact at higher levels of government. One strategy has been to organize and participate in consortia to bring attention to the problems of city schools and the fiscal requirements of addressing them. ACORN and its partners frame this work as an effort to "re-legitimize spending on public education." ACORN has been key in forming two coalitions, one citywide and one statewide, that have the goal of pushing fair funding for New York City schools and for public education in general. The Parent Organizing Consortium (POC) coordinates citywide campaigns, aimed both at the local and state levels, for class size reduction, school construction, qualified teachers, and pre-K programs.

The statewide coalition, The Alliance for Quality Education, is a year-old effort still being formalized to bring together organizations interested in school reform. A key aim of the Alliance is to push elected state officials to increase allocations for education and target them to poorly performing schools in low-income communities. The directors of Citizen Action (a statewide grassroots organization working for social and economic justice) and NY ACORN are co-chairs of the Alliance. Other members include the Parent Organizing Consortium, Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition, two state teachers unions, the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, policy groups like NYU's Institute for Education and Social Policy, the Fiscal Policy Institute, and the Community Aid Association.

The director of Citizen Action told us that ACORN's contribution to the statewide alliance stems from its track record on school reform in New York City.

"[ACORN brings to the coalition] a long history and track record on school reform in New York City. They have a good idea of what investments in education should be made, that is what is really going to make a difference. This is what they bring to the coalition...their experience working with schools of highest need gives them an understanding of what schools need." DIRECTOR, NEW YORK CITIZEN ACTION

She also noted that this was a strategic moment to push for fair funding, because there is widespread agreement that schools will need additional resources to met the new standards the state has set. To support her sense that "the timing was right," she cited a recent State Supreme Court decision favoring fiscal equity, implementation of new state learning standards by the Regents, and a surplus in the state budget. She noted, "The new standards create a policy and political opening. Students can't graduate unless they pass the tests, but schools don't have the resources to accomplish the goal and everyone knows it."

Second Indicator Area: Leadership Development

"The mission of the ACORN National Schools Office is to build a base of parent leaders with information, skills, and perspective necessary to recreate school systems to serve children rather than the interests of competing factions of adults." ACORN DOCUMENT, PROPOSAL FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING INSTITUTE

ACORN organizers see all of their work—whether at the neighborhood level, working in the ACORN high schools, carrying out the policy studies, or conducting broader campaigns—as opportunities to develop leaders who in turn will forward the agenda. We have determined three measures of ACORN's work in the area of leadership development. ACORN *creates settings for leadership development* as members work to establish schools and participate with school staff in planning and decision-making. ACORN's *training provides parents and community members with extensive knowledge* about education, school improvement and power structures of the city and school board, and *ACORN members gain a growing sense that they can influence others and bring about change.*

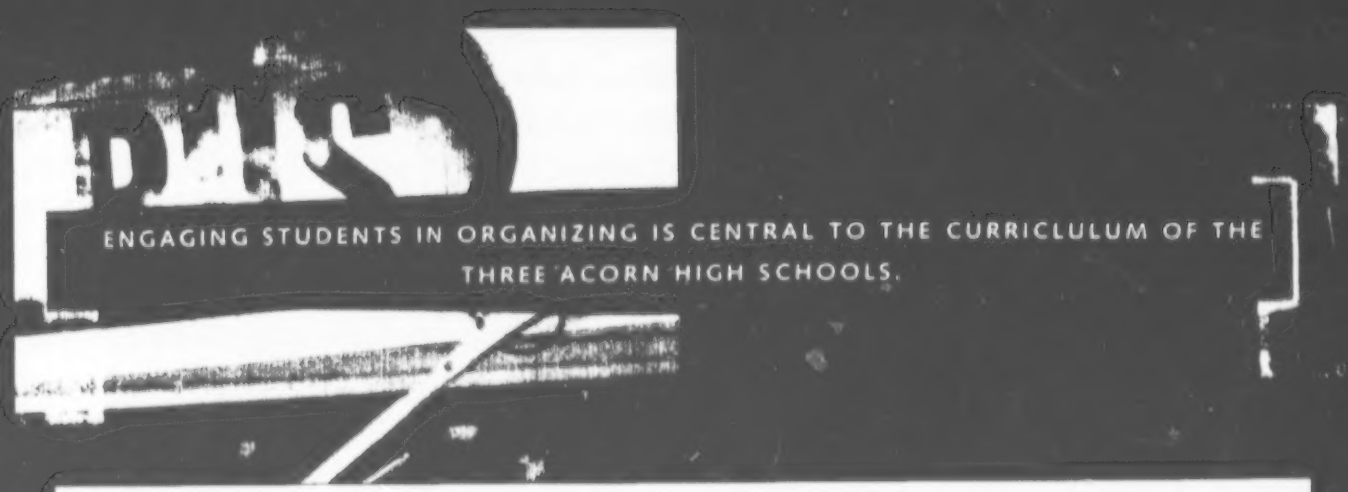
Creating Settings For Leadership Development

The work of establishing and partnering in ACORN schools creates opportunities for learning and leadership. Much of the activity that the ACORN organizers undertake in the schools involves students, parents, and teachers in understanding the sources of problems in the larger system and taking action to address them. Parents and students in ACORN schools participate in ACORN rallies, in leadership training, and in internships to learn about organizing; they also take lead roles in planning and carrying out campaigns.

The ACORN schools provide an important site for parents to learn leadership skills, as they participate in establishing the schools and on decision-making bodies within them. ACORN is committed to democratic governance within the schools; it sees one aspect of its role as a "partner" as making sure that parents and ACORN members participate with teachers in decision-making about hiring, curriculum, program structure, and spending.

ACORN actively recruits parents to participate on school committees. These include curriculum committees (including the Long Term Planning Committee recently formed to address curriculum and teaching) and the School Leadership Team (a mandated committee, made up of equal numbers of parents and school staff, which has authority over the budget and the yearly comprehensive education plan for a school). In schools where ACORN is a partner, ACORN staff and members of its citywide Education Committee have gained representation on the School Leadership Teams. ACORN's participation on these teams ensures that planning and budgeting take into consideration the requirements of the curricular theme that ACORN espouses. ACORN encourages parents on the School Leadership Teams to request quantitative information on student outcomes from the principal so that they can monitor student performance and use this information to guide their recommendations.

ACORN organizers also encourage parent and teacher participation in other school committees and organizations. Parents participate directly in hiring teachers; key criteria include candidates' commitment and ability to address ACORN's curricular priorities in their teaching. ACORN organizing helps to get out the vote for School Leadership Team elections, raises awareness of issues of importance, and trains parents in budgeting and curriculum so that they can participate fully in decision-making in the school. ACORN organizers also work with teachers to encourage their participation in the PTA and to make sure that they are fairly represented on the various committees.



ENGAGING STUDENTS IN ORGANIZING IS CENTRAL TO THE CURRICLULUM OF THE THREE ACORN HIGH SCHOOLS.

One distinguishing aspect of ACORN's leadership development is its work with students. Engaging students in organizing is central to the curriculum of the three ACORN high schools. Students have investigated inequities in their own neighborhoods and have waged campaigns. For example, at ACORN Community High School, the students organized a campaign to get a bus stop restored in front of their school because of concerns about their safety in walking several blocks to the next one. They looked into how the decision to remove the bus stop had come about, then organized and staged rallies with support from the ACORN organizer at their school and others. They met with elected officials and representatives of the transit authority and eventually won back the bus stop. At another school, the students undertook a project to study environmental influences on asthma in their communities, with an eye to taking action once they had identified a clear target. At the ACORN High School for Social Justice, students participated in ACORN rallies and spent the summer as interns learning about organizing through experience.

ACORN Members Gain Knowledge and Skills Related to Education

ACORN's work with its members represents a significant investment in leadership development. Early on in its education work, ACORN organizers moved from a focus on encouraging parents to run in community school board elections to an emphasis on informing parents more broadly about education issues. ACORN recognized the importance of having a base of members who are knowledgeable about their rights in the public schools, have an idea what good schools look like, and know how they can work for school improvement. One area in which ACORN carries out leadership training and workshops is in understanding and formulating school budgets. Long after the Rockaway New School dissolved, the Far Rockaway superintendent began to contract with ACORN to work with parents because of its reputation for training parents to take leadership roles in the schools and fight for resources. Other community districts have also contracted with ACORN to train parents who will be on the School Leadership Teams.

ACORN Members Gain a Sense That They Can Influence Others and Bring About Change

With ACORN's assistance, parents and community members also gain sophistication about the power structures of the city and school system. Through their research and participation in campaigns involving face-to-face meetings with city and school officials, they gain an understanding of their rights and become strategic about how to articulate and win demands. Core groups of leaders, in turn, then organize other parents. For example, the ACORN members at the high schools see as part of their roles bringing along other parents, whether ACORN members or not, to understand their rights and entitlement to hold the school accountable.

Through involvement in the South Bronx Campaign, ACORN leaders also gained the experience and confidence to influence policies on a local level by organizing at individual schools. For example, some parents have worked to make Parent Teacher Association meetings more accessible for low-income parents, whose family and work obligations often prevented them from attending daytime meetings. As another example, parents influenced a principal to change his policy and allow children to wait inside the school in the early morning on cold days.

Third Indicator Area: Community Power

ACORN works to maintain a significant base of membership so that it can use the strategy of direct action when necessary, while at the same time leaders and organizers have built a network of influence with city officials and politicians that the organization can also tap for influence. ACORN uses these two strategies to build community power. Community power is important because it can move entrenched officials in a complicated and often politically constrained system.

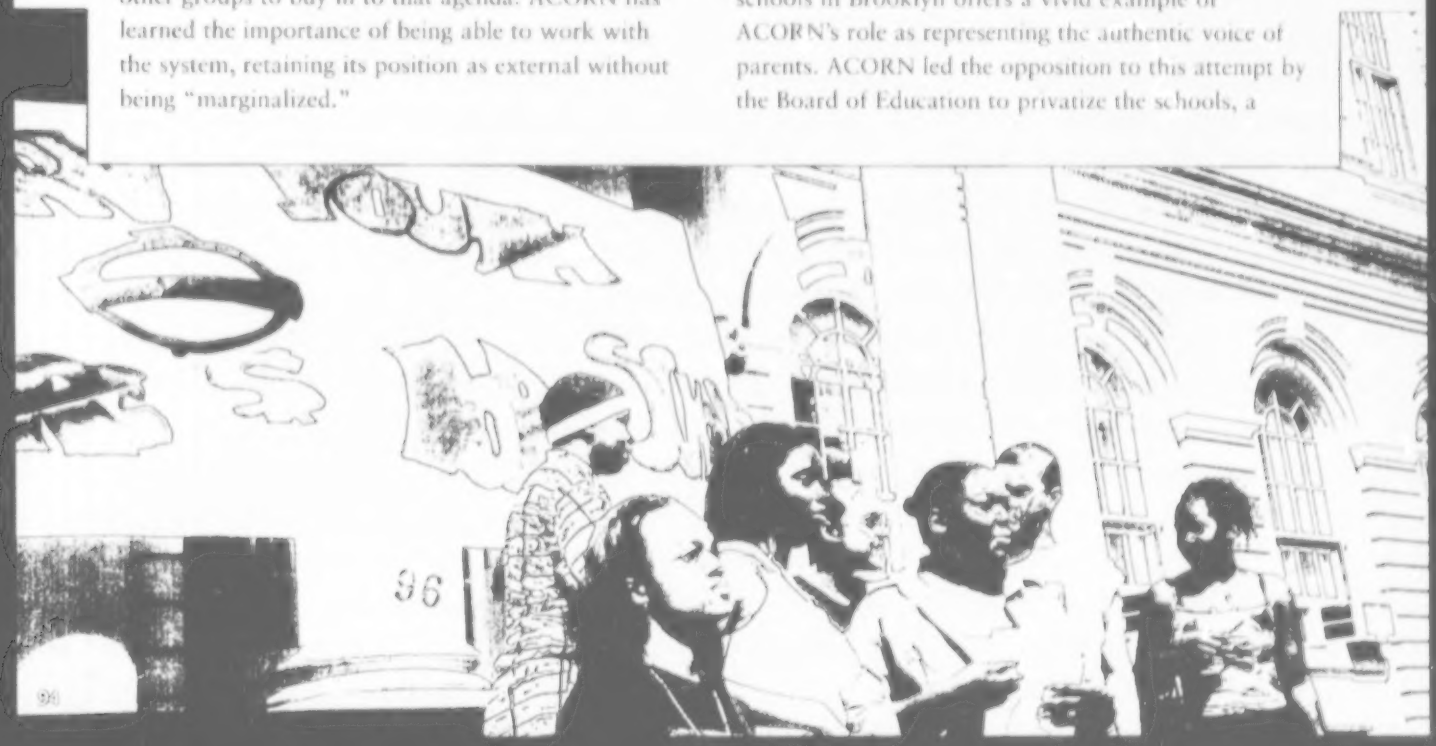
There are several ways to measure the power that ACORN has built in its neighborhoods and among its members. One measure is the widespread recognition that ACORN represents the authentic voices of low-income and working-class parents and has also established credentials with the reform community as having education expertise. This recognition has resulted in a responsiveness of public officials to ACORN demands. ACORN's influence makes it capable of cutting through bureaucracy to move plans forward or protect its schools from interference. In addition, ACORN has built power through partnerships and collaborations with other groups, including other organizing groups, the teachers' union, and strategically positioned non-profits. ACORN, representing the voices of low-income citizens, has won *"a seat at the table"* in education reform in New York City, so that it can *set the agenda for reform* and get other groups to buy in to that agenda. ACORN has learned the importance of being able to work with the system, retaining its position as external without being "marginalized."

ACORN Seen as Representing the Authentic Voice of Parents in the Schools

"We're creating the noise from the parents. You know, we're getting the attention drawn to it. All last year, we were doing constant [media appearances]....We were like New York One. We, at that point, were basically the official voice of parents." ACORN ORGANIZER REFERRING TO ACTIONS RELATED TO THE ANTI-EDISON CAMPAIGN.

While ACORN is certainly not the only group engaged in education organizing in New York City, it is among the most visible, and is generally acknowledged by the press, city officials, and school board as authentically representing a broad-based constituency of parents. For example, when ACORN was working in Far Rockaway, the superintendent at the time was engaged in a battle with his community board and saw ACORN as a group that could help him organize parents to become aware of corruption within the board. Now working with one of the four partners in the New York Networks for School Renewal, he explained that ACORN was an essential partner in the reform coalition because of its grassroots credentials.

More recently, the fight to prevent the for-profit Edison program from taking over five low-performing schools in Brooklyn offers a vivid example of ACORN's role as representing the authentic voice of parents. ACORN led the opposition to this attempt by the Board of Education to privatize the schools, a



change which under state law would require the support of a majority of parents. ACORN facilitated parent opposition by holding public meetings where the proposal could be debated, organizing parents to talk to other parents about their concerns, filing a lawsuit asserting that the initial voting process would be susceptible to fraud, and encouraging parents to participate in the vote. In the end, 80 percent of the parents voting opposed an Edison takeover; ACORN's role in the outcome was acknowledged in the press coverage of the events. As a result of this involvement, ACORN members are now in conversations to design and monitor improvement efforts at these schools.

Establishing Credentials with the Reform Community as Having Education Expertise

"And so these three high schools have been born and have been built to put schools in our neighborhoods. That has brought us [into] dealing with educators and the educational institutions head on. Then you begin to write intellectual reports about education, attending conferences and seminars...then you enter this other world and the educators want to talk to you." ACORN ORGANIZER

ACORN has gained a reputation as powerful not only by virtue of numbers of active members, but also because of its expertise in education and track record in establishing new schools. ACORN has garnered respect as an organization that not only raises issues, but also proposes solutions that are credible and drawn from its own experience in the trenches. ACORN staff members use the term "credentializing" to describe their efforts to be taken seriously by the Board of Education and by other school reform groups; these hard-won credentials have made ACORN a "player" in education reform in the city. One of the benefits of having credentials, according to an ACORN staff member, is that the organization can accomplish its goals not only through actions, or "going into the streets," but also through negotiation. "We know who to call; we have enough allies; we're not starting from ground zero."

ACORN's credentials as a powerful grassroots organization are paramount, and it would never abandon its direct action strategy. However, having credentials in working with the education system gives the organization alternative ways to access power. While some in the education reform community are reluctant to give ACORN full credit for its education expertise, they nonetheless acknowledge that ACORN's extensive work with schools and understanding of the bureaucracy distinguishes it among grassroots organizations. Its NYNSR partners give ACORN credit for working to maintain a relationship with its schools, which they see as the real challenge for a community-based organization. The head of Citizen Action, part of the statewide Alliance for School Quality, unequivocally sees ACORN as having strong education credentials. She emphasized that they have "concrete solutions" and "can identify what needs to be done." ACORN's achievements on multiple levels, from school-based work in local communities to system-wide policy work, has contributed to building ACORN's reputation, which increases the organization's power.

Responsiveness of Public Officials to ACORN Demands

The responsiveness of school and elected officials to ACORN's requests and recommendations is another measure of its power. Over the past several years, ACORN has been able to get the attention of the chancellor through political connections, public actions, or as a result of the charges raised in *Secret Apartheid* reports and widely publicized. Chancellor Crew's call for district superintendents to carry out the first comprehensive survey of gifted programs in the district in over ten years was in direct response to *Secret Apartheid I*. The city comptroller's interest in conducting an audit of federal funds for magnet programs is another example of public officials' responsiveness to ACORN's work.

In the past year, the Bronx Campaign brought a new level of responsiveness from the chancellor. In response to the release of *No Silver Bullet,* documenting the failure of schools in three South Bronx Districts, the new chancellor, Harold Levy, agreed to meet with ACORN to discuss the demands presented in the report. Looking for ways to build his own power as a new chancellor without the mayor's endorsement, Mr. Levy's responsiveness may reflect his view of ACORN as a group that represents a large base of community members. Whatever the reason, he met with ACORN leaders twice and agreed to

ACORN HAS "ACCESS" IN THAT IT IS ABLE TO GET THE ATTENTION OF THE CHANCELLOR AND OTHER HIGH LEVEL OFFICIALS AT THE CENTRAL BOARD AND CITY GOVERNMENT.

introduce the reforms called for in *No Silver Bullet*—implementation of Success For All, smaller class sizes, staff development, and an extended day program—in fifteen South Bronx schools. In addition, he agreed to ACORN's request to open a new high school in the Bronx.

As one observer noted, ACORN has "access" in that it is able to get the attention of the chancellor and the ears of other high level officials at the Central Board and in city government. It also draws on its store of "political capital," relationships with public officials with whom it has engaged in its other organizing work over the years, for such access.

Cutting Through the Bureaucracy

ACORN has shown itself able to use the power of community organizing to cut through bureaucracy to get things done. ACORN's ability to obtain a facility and other resources for the Bread & Roses High School provides an example of this kind of power. Bread & Roses actually came into the fold of new small high schools as part of the New York Networks for School Renewal process through New Visions. As the principal of Bread & Roses explained, once New Visions approved the school, "we thought we were home free." However, the Board offered little support in finding a space. "The bureaucracy had no way of assisting us, even though members of the bureaucracy had approved our plan." Despite the fact that Bread & Roses had the support of "a whole pantheon of people," staff was stymied in getting a school site. "We went to ACORN because we saw what they were doing in the community in terms of housing, in terms of working with people in the city who needed assistance in order to become powerful voices in their communities. And that's sort of what we wanted our school to do."

After a courtship between ACORN and the staff of Bread & Roses, with each meeting drawing more members, ACORN agreed to affiliate with the school and to assist in finding a space. The principal told the story of meeting with political figures, filling their offices with fifty people. "It was much more impressive, and we got a much different kind of response from these politicians." She described the meeting with the superintendent of Manhattan high schools, at which there were about 150 ACORN members present, as pivotal.

"we came to that meeting...there were a lot of ACORN members there. And they introduced themselves to him [the Manhattan high schools superintendent] and said, 'We represent ACORN, and ACORN represents 20,000 dues-paying members in New York City. And we want to speak for our membership. And two weeks later, we had the space. So the message that I take from that is that if there isn't organizational support amongst working people for something to happen, it doesn't happen. And it doesn't matter how many bureaucrats want it to happen or think it is a good idea to have it happen."

ACORN SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The Bread & Roses case illustrates how community power can be invoked to create the political will that allowed the Central Board staff to take action.

In another instance involving the High School for Social Justice (SOJO), the school's association with ACORN provided protection from demands that would have threatened its development. When SOJO was assigned many more students than the school had planned for, the principal worried that he would have to increase class size the next year. He knew he could not refuse the district's decision, but he knew that if ACORN objected to the numbers, the district superintendent would respond. "I can't say to the Superintendent, 'I can't take 150 kids next year', but they can." The principal of SOJO came to see ACORN as an ally, explaining how ACORN "runs interference" with the superintendent, which " makes a big difference."

One of the New York Networks for School Renewal partners, in characterizing ACORN's accomplishments, described the role of community power in dealing with the chancellor and others in the school administration,

"So what they are able to do finally is that ACORN is capable of giving institutional protection to its babies. This is a very important issue, when you start schools that are 'strange' in a system, it is very important that you extend that protection. They are vulnerable; people will try to attack them. You have to create that institutional protection."

OUTSIDE PARTNER

Partnerships and Collaborations

ACORN has been instrumental in establishing partnerships that gain it clout by increasing the numbers of people represented, adding political capital, and complementing its own expertise and capacity. For the Bronx Campaign and the statewide Alliance, ACORN's partnership with the 80,000-member United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has been a deliberate strategy to strengthen its position. Collaboration with the union on the South Bronx Campaign is also critical to the campaign's ultimate success, since several of the proposed measures concern teaching and teacher recruitment. With the UFT and other unions as partners in the statewide coalition, grassroots and advocacy organizations not only benefit from the union's power of numbers, but also provide a model for an alliance of parents and community members with teachers.

In order to amplify community voices addressing issues of concern to parents and students across the city, ACORN worked to pull together the Parent Organizing Consortium (POC), which includes both large and small organizing groups in the city. One observer noted that, for the most part, POC members learned from each other and strengthened each other's work. "There is a lot of trust and they can deal with turf and money issues. ...They can be critical of each other, but it is within a 'house.'"

ACORN also strengthened its work by bringing in organizations with expertise in critical arenas. ACORN collaborated with the Education Trust and Fair Test in carrying out the work for *Secret Apartheid II*, which examined relationships between coursework and testing. It worked with NYU's Institute for Education and Social Policy to carry out the analysis of the conditions of schools in the South Bronx and to develop the agenda for the South Bronx Campaign. The quality of this work reflects ACORN's strategic understanding of how to bring in collaborators to provide the expertise and polish necessary for its work to be taken seriously.

Winning a Seat at the Table

"...the politics of that [Annenberg Challenge grant] were incredible, and yet we hung on and stayed in there...with the usual big three suspects, because we understood that there is no way that kind of money, those kinds of resources, those kinds of education conversations were going to come into this city without us being at the table. If Annenberg is going to have a community aspect, ACORN is going to be it." ACORN ORGANIZER

As noted above, the original partners in the Annenberg-funded New York Networks for School Renewal recognized that they lacked community

credentials and invited ACORN in as the partner to provide them. Two of the partners reflected on ACORN's work over the past years and noted that it had become increasingly accepted as a significant education reform organization that offered an important dimension to school reform that other kinds of groups could not offer. One of the partners considered that having a seat at the table was a measure of ACORN's success, noting how easy it would be for a group like ACORN to be marginalized. She said, "Your success can be measured if you are not marginalized so that you have no impact other than an advocacy role, that you are actually able to influence programs. They [ACORN] were able to do that as an external agency. How well you are able to develop a collaborative relationship, not be marginalized, not be pushed to the point where all you are doing is raising your voice. They did figure out how to do this."

Setting the Agenda for Reform

"We aim to rewrite the rules for what constitutes reform in low performing schools. It can't just be done by imposing policies from above or just by teachers. It must be done by a real collaboration." ACORN ORGANIZER

The *Secret Apartheid* studies, the agenda of the Bronx School Improvement Campaign, the work of the Parent Organizing Consortium—all illustrate ways in which ACORN has influenced the agenda of school reform in New York City. As noted earlier, the chancellor responded to the charges in the three *Secret Apartheid* studies in several ways: calling for a survey of gifted programs, expanding the Math and Science Institute, and committing to setting up a task force on tracking. ACORN's continued attention to the issues raised in the studies kept the pressure on so that these issues remained on the agenda over time. It is indeed a significant challenge to keep the attention of a school system as complex as New York City's focused on a particular issue.

From its experience in establishing schools and in listening to the concerns of parents in local neighborhoods, ACORN understands the critical problems of the public schools and has carried out research and consulted others to determine what are the best solutions. While the *Secret Apartheid* studies focused on tracking and access to special programs, most of ACORN's citywide and statewide work at this point focuses on how to improve schools for all students through improving teacher and principal quality, reducing class size and relieving overcrowding in schools. These are the elements of the Bronx Campaign, and are also reflected in the agenda of the Parent Organizing Consortium.

ACORN has come to see that, in order for the New York Schools to enact these improvements, the heart of the matter is funding. Hence, the focus of both POC and the statewide Alliance ultimately comes down to increasing funding. Both an ACORN organizer and the director of the Parent Organizing Consortium used the same language in describing their driving focus as "re-legitimizing spending on public education." The Director of NY Citizen Action noted that one measure of an organization's strength is its ability to set the agenda. As she notes, ACORN has been able to "shape the agenda" in New York City. "They have shaped the chancellor's and others' opinion of what would be effective, other groups want to work with them, and they have been able to pull up other groups because of their reputation."

Fourth Indicator Area: High Quality Instruction and Curriculum

ACORN's work in education organizing has developed a variety of strategies for improving student learning through improving teaching and providing relevant and challenging curriculum. ACORN's work can be measured by the degree to which it brings attention to and addresses issues of improving teacher quality. By establishing small autonomous schools, ACORN's work has had the effect of increasing the relevance of curriculum. The Bronx School Improvement Campaign has also focused attention on reading and literacy, resulting in a pilot of the Success for All reading program in fifteen schools.

Improving Teacher Quality

In *No Silver Bullet,* ACORN points to research on teacher professional development and effective practices in New York's District 2 and the Chancellor's District and seeks to use these as models for the South Bronx schools. The report calls for incentives to recruit more experienced and highly-skilled teachers and principals to failing schools and to support them once hired. ACORN has also focused the agenda of

citywide and statewide efforts on professional development and teacher recruitment strategies to increase the quality of the teaching force for low-income and racially/ethnically isolated schools.

Discussions in the ACORN high schools' Long-Term Planning Committees likewise have led to measures designed to support teacher professional development and student learning. These measures include: staff development days for which teachers themselves developed the themes; grade-level collaboration resulting in adaptation of the community organizing theme for each high school year; and structural changes that support teacher collaboration and joint planning, strengthened relationships between students and teachers, and team teaching and interdisciplinary planning.

ACORN also obtained professional development support for teachers in ACORN Community High School and the High School for Social Justice through the New Educators Support Team (NEST), a program of New York Networks for School Renewal. This program brings a master teacher into the school on a regular basis to work one-on-one with teachers and to facilitate larger staff development sessions.

It will be important to track the measures of improvements in student learning in the high schools and the pilot South Bronx schools over the next year (or more) to make a case for expanding the number of ACORN-affiliated schools. It will also be important to track the benefits of increased investment in professional development, as well as the expansion of effective strategies for professional development.

Creating Schools with Relevant Curriculum that Connects to Students' Lives and Communities

Following from its aim of building community power and its commitment to social justice, ACORN has developed materials and structures to help ACORN schools realize the theme of "organizing for social change and social justice" throughout the curriculum. At the request of school staff, ACORN established and leads a Long-Term Planning Committee in each of the three high schools to bring school constituencies together in a formal dialogue about implementing the theme throughout the curriculum, and they have developed a staged approach to introducing concepts and practices of social justice across the grades.

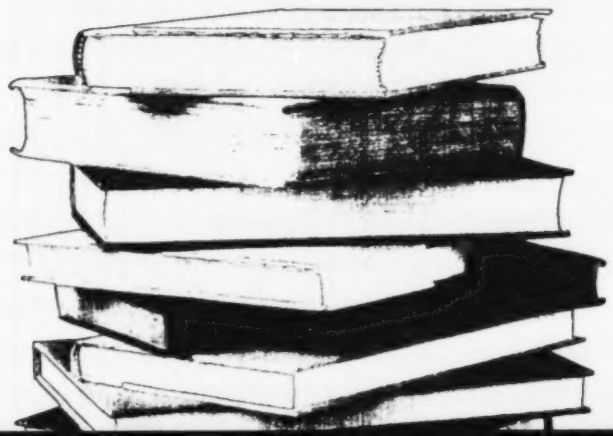
Through ACORN Clubs and other forums, ACORN has also worked directly with students on carrying out research and direct action on issues of relevance to them. Through these activities, students find out about their communities, gain practice in analyzing the roles of public and private sector institutions in their lives, and learn about practices of community organizing and leadership. Mentioned earlier was the bus stop campaign that students waged at ACORN Community High School. Students at Bread & Roses waged a "jobs campaign" in which they called a number of private sector companies to ask for meetings and then for summer jobs. Through this campaign,

they learned about career ladders, issues of access to jobs in the private sector, and how to approach companies; they also obtained some commitments.

Student organizing at Bread & Roses also focused on environmental racism, as students looked at the incidence of asthma in their neighborhoods and explored the environmental causes of asthma in light of conditions in their Washington Heights community. At the High School for Social Justice, students met to discuss their participation in an upcoming rally on predatory lending. With some parents joining in, they learned about unfair lending practices that threatened the economic health of their neighborhoods. These examples demonstrate a unique feature of ACORN's education organizing related to its work at the high school level—encouraging and facilitating students' learning through their participation in organizing and direct action.

Focus on Improving Reading Achievement

Through careful analysis of data in its *No Silver Bullet* report and through the South Bronx School Improvement Campaign, ACORN has brought attention to the dismal reading achievement of students in these local districts. The report calls for the public schools to focus resources on improving reading, and recommends the research-based reading skill development approach, Success For All, along with professional support to implement it. It will be important for ACORN to track the implementation and achievement outcomes of Success for All in the first fifteen schools, in order to make a case for expanding or adapting the approach if it is effective. In making the Bronx School Improvement Agenda comprehensive, ACORN wisely recognized the need to provide a spectrum of supports to schools in addition to a structured curriculum, so that teachers ultimately have the skills and professional community to go beyond Success for All in improving the literacy skills of their students.

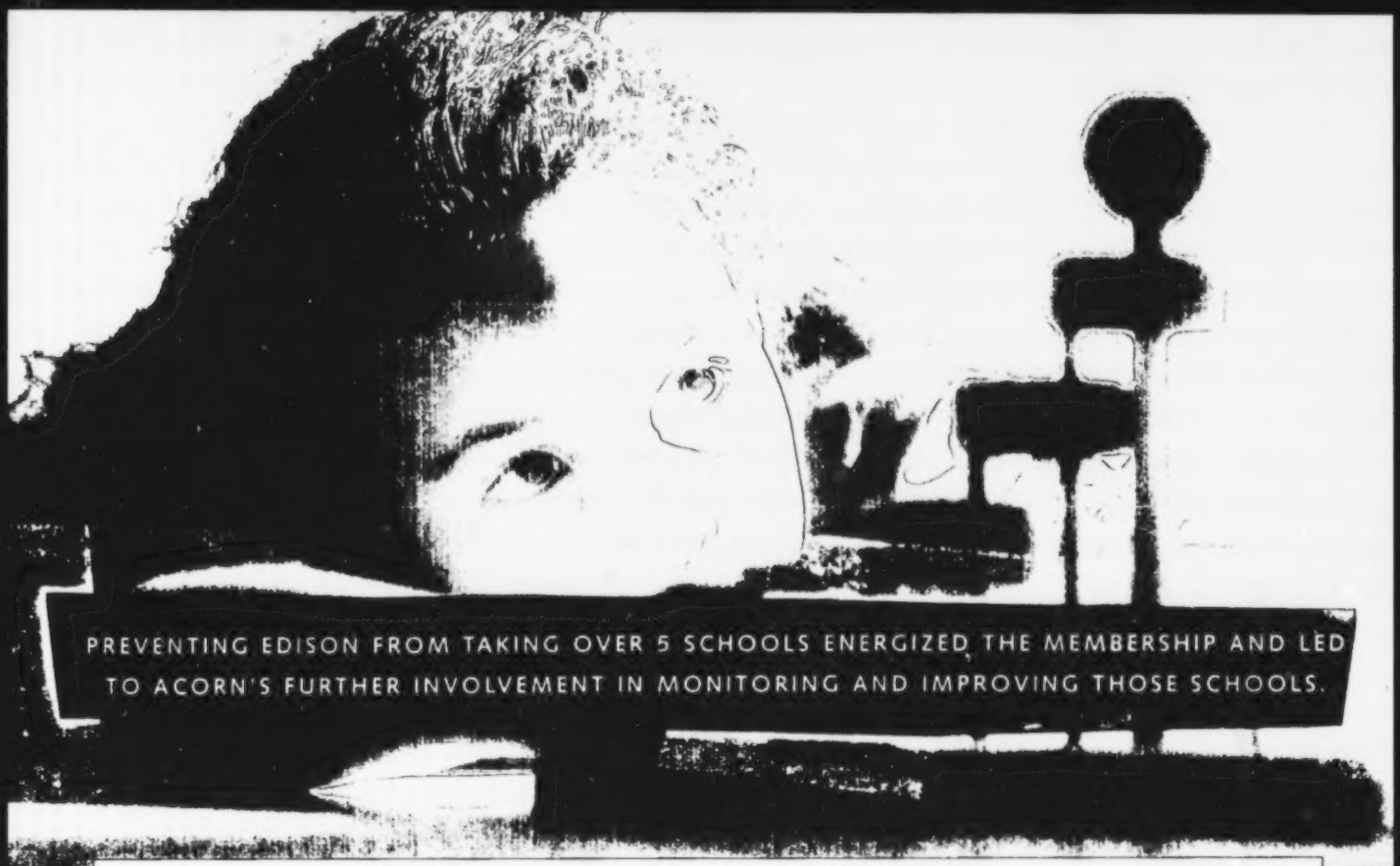


Future Directions

As this report illustrates, ACORN has many accomplishments resulting from its school reform organizing. ACORN organizers and leaders agree, however, that their strategies must constantly adapt to the shifting political and economic landscape and to turnover of system staff. Strategy also evolves as ACORN learns from its own experience about what it takes to stay involved in schools, to keep members engaged, to have sufficient depth and scale of impact, among other challenges. In other words, the education organizing strategy is really a work in progress. As a result, ACORN organizers are continually reflecting on and revising their strategy and the balance among the different levels at which they work.

Future directions must respond to a series of challenges that ACORN has identified, which fall into two broad categories. One set of challenges clusters around the effort to bring about policy change and reform at the system level. These include the need to connect the various levels at which ACORN works, to build and sustain a committed membership base, to have an impact at a sufficient scale to make a difference for large numbers of community members, and to address issues of teaching and learning. A major question in this area is how ACORN can balance the *scale* of impact with the *immediacy* of impact. This issue involves tradeoffs which have implications for maintaining ACORN's membership base. The question of how ACORN can best use its important alliances, particularly with the teachers union, is also significant in relation to ACORN's impact at the policy level and at a large scale.

Another set of challenges clusters around realizing the vision for the ACORN schools. Here, challenges include, getting at issues of teaching and learning, having responsibility for the success of the schools while not necessarily having sufficient influence on the program and approach, and making the schools truly democratically run to reflect the values and approach of community organizing for social justice. The main question here is, what does it mean to be a partner in a school and what would the work of organizing at the ACORN schools need to look like to support the organization's vision?



PREVENTING EDISON FROM TAKING OVER 5 SCHOOLS ENERGIZED THE MEMBERSHIP AND LED TO ACORN'S FURTHER INVOLVEMENT IN MONITORING AND IMPROVING THOSE SCHOOLS.

Reforming Public Education on a Large Scale

As this report makes clear, ACORN works on multiple levels at once—from the policy level citywide and statewide to the local school level in neighborhoods where ACORN members raise concerns about their schools. ACORN sees a need to connect its work at the various levels, if it is to succeed both in increasing its impact and also broadening its membership base. For an organization that is based in its membership, continued momentum is important to sustain experienced members and increase the membership base. Working at the neighborhood level, ACORN members can become energized when they take on issues such as safety or bilingual education at a single school, but working school by school is labor intensive and ultimately diffuses members' energy.

With this in mind, ACORN organizers and leaders hope to find a balance between the immediacy of organizing at the neighborhood level, which attracts members and keeps them engaged, and organizing on a broader policy level, which is necessary for meaningful impact. They see a need for "intermediate structures" to bridge the gap between the very broad scale organizing represented by the statewide coalition and the more narrowly focused organizing entailed in working school by school. They plan to build on the model of the South Bronx Campaign or the campaign that led to the defeat of the Edison Schools bid. Preventing Edison from taking over five schools energized the membership base and led to ACORN's further involvement in monitoring and improving those schools.

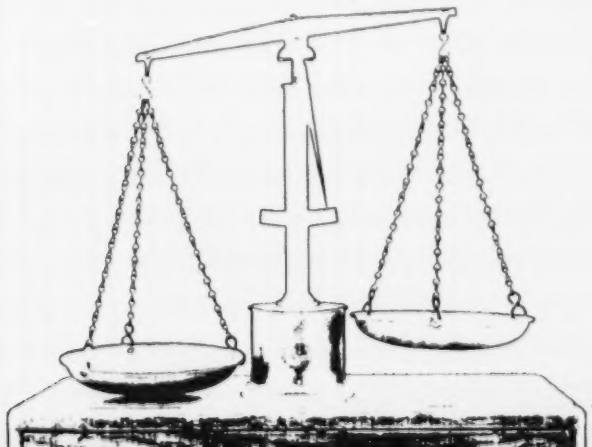
The "intermediate structure" model means working with five to ten schools in a defined neighborhood in what ACORN organizers refer to as a "broad based campaign at the neighborhood level to force changes and bring resources into several schools at once." They believe that by working at this intermediate level, they can leverage their credibility on citywide issues, along with their base at the neighborhood level, to impact policy more broadly. ACORN organizers next will put this strategy in place in East Brooklyn, where work has already begun.

ACORN organizers also see their partnerships with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and key political figures as key in these future campaigns. While the cast of school system players has constantly

changed, ACORN has been able to draw on its political capital, connections with powerful individuals with whom it has worked not only on education but on housing campaigns as well, and this has kept them in the game despite constant turnover. ACORN sees its partnership with the UFT as tremendously important to its having impact which is both meaningful and at a wide scale, since the union's reach is system-wide and any effort to effect change either at the classroom level or in terms of teacher recruitment and placement needs the union's blessing to succeed.

Realizing the Vision for ACORN Schools

ACORN's work in creating schools does not end when the doors open to the first student, but continues as ACORN seeks to refine its role, adapt its organizing strategy, and, at the same time, translate the vision of its neighborhood organizing into the school setting. ACORN recognizes that the partnership role presents several challenges. While the schools are "autonomous," in the sense that they have their own administration, staff, building, and curricular focus, the schools are still part of and therefore subject to many of the pressures and regulations of the New York City school system. The administrator has the dual, and sometimes conflicting, task of meeting the needs of both the community partner and school board officials above him or her in the hierarchy. In this structural context, ACORN must forge a role and working relationship with school staff that supports the school and at the same time assures that the program reflects ACORN's vision—a truly democratic setting and a challenging academic program in which social justice is fully integrated into students' learning experiences. Despite the structural factors that limit ACORN's control over what happens in the school, ACORN is held accountable for the schools' outcomes in the court of public opinion.



The school level organizing is intensive and ACORN has assigned to each school an organizer whose task it is to work with all of the constituents—teachers, students, parents, and administrators. This is a very labor-intensive process that involves building buy in through one-on-ones, separate meetings with each group of constituents, and encouragement for different groups to work sensitively together. The organizers work behind the scenes to build a democratic culture by encouraging wide participation of parents and teachers on committees. As one of the school organizers described it, her work is to "create a space where parents and teachers can build bridges." Organizers measure their impact by the degree to which communication is occurring between teachers and parents, the number of teachers who come to PTA meetings, and evidence of parents and teachers working together for common purposes. They also measure their success by the principal's receptivity to the ideas of parents and teachers.

In addition to building a democratic culture within ACORN schools, the organizers and leaders hope to build networks across the ACORN schools. When a strong community leader from the South Bronx attended a Bread and Roses PTA meeting, for example, she was able to put the problems parents and staff were discussing into perspective, and this helped them move forward. ACORN sees these networks as a way to build social capital among parents from all three schools, as they ask each other how they can work together to hold schools accountable.

Organizing in schools has required ACORN to adapt its organizing approach as it has refined its role as being both insider and outsider in the school context. As one of the school organizers framed the challenge, "The external policy work comes easier to the organizing; it is easier to polarize issues, find a real target and shape a campaign. It is harder where you are both sitting at the table and trying to work for change externally." The school organizers described the tensions parents feel in being both outside (holding schools accountable) and inside (having a seat at the decision-making table); they see their own responsibility as helping parents figure out how to be powerful in both roles. The job of organizing in schools builds on ACORN's considerable expertise, but also requires innovation. ACORN organizers are developing approaches for working with principals and for creating structures, processes, and values that

assure students are learning at high levels at the same time as they are actively engaged in their learning both inside and outside the classroom.

The Challenge of New York City's Financial Crisis in the Aftermath of 9/11

New York ACORN faces the significant challenge of figuring out how to operate in the context of recent terrorist events and a new mayoral administration. ACORN has committed itself to continue working for democratic ideals, seeing its mission as even more important in light of recent events. The ACORN website has a message about the organization's reaction to 9/11 from ACORN president Maude Hurd, who states that she mourns the loss of ACORN's own members in the tragedy and calls on ACORN members across the country to renew their commitments.

"ACORN members, like other Americans, are pulling together all over the country in our resolve to continue to show America as the democracy it is. On the same day as this tragedy, ACORN members all over the country were involved in working to help elect candidates responsive to the working families of America. We will continue to work to keep our democracy strong while supporting each other and our communities at this time of grief."

Nonetheless, both the city and state will shoulder enormous expenses to repair damage, and the city faces severe budget deficits stemming from the loss of jobs and businesses. The challenge of this turn of events to groups pushing for education reform cannot be underestimated; even in the era of economic well-being during the boom years of the 1990s, organizing groups and education advocates had to do battle for increases and equity in education spending. Further, the new city administration favors a new governance arrangement with strong mayoral control, which has implications for Chancellor Levy's tenure. It will likely be more difficult now to get the attention of high level school officials, given their pre-occupation with deficits and the dislocated schools in Lower Manhattan. As the website message indicates, however, ACORN intends to continue as before, seeing its work in strengthening democracy and bringing about more equitable conditions as more important than ever.

Case Study: OCO

OAKLAND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

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Introduction to Oakland Community Organizations

The Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) is committed to the improvement of the long-term prospects of families and youth living in the Oakland flatlands neighborhoods, which are low- to moderate-income, traditionally African-American communities where numerous immigrant groups have settled in recent years. The concern of OCO members with the quality of flatlands schools has led it to focus on reforming public education. OCO brings to its school reform efforts a prominent history of organizing residents and building political alliances to win improved conditions for flatlands neighborhoods.

OCO's members are vocal in their concerns about overcrowding in flatlands schools and children's low reading scores. To address these concerns, OCO has advocated for several reform initiatives, including school-to-career programs, reduced class size, after-school homework clubs, charter schools, and small schools. Over the past five years, OCO members have researched different approaches to improving schools, including making site visits to successful schools that serve neighborhoods in New York and Chicago with demographics similar to the flatlands. In light of this research, OCO's organizing became increasingly focused on small schools as a key strategy for reforming Oakland public schools. It has not, however, abandoned some of its other strategies, such as charters. The OCO executive director explained that the group's overarching goal is to increase the choices for families living in flatlands neighborhoods, who currently have access only to overcrowded, low-performing schools.

In the spring of 1999, OCO and the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES, a well-established school reform group that has traditionally focused on teachers) formalized a partnership to build a long-term school reform campaign. The goal of this campaign was to end overcrowding and multi-tracking, and work for small autonomous schools (schools with site-based management/local decision-making). The partnership has led to an Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) policy supporting the creation of new small schools, with a priority for their establishment in neighborhoods with overcrowded schools. OCO and BayCES are now working in partnership with the OUSD to implement the policy. OCO's organizing work with parents, community members, and teachers was critical to bringing about the policy and is now central to its implementation.

MULTI-TRACKING

Multi-tracking is one way that the Oakland Unified School District has been dealing with overcrowding. With multi-tracking, there is a year-round school calendar, and some children and teachers "rove," that is, change classrooms every month to three months. In conformity with California laws about language learning, multi-tracking sorts students by language group.

OCO is active in all the eight indicator areas used in this project.[1] In this report, we relate OCO's accomplishments in detail in four of the areas.[2] The four areas are:

- **COMMUNITY POWER**
- **EQUITY**
- **SOCIAL CAPITAL**
- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

NOTES

1. For a chart representing OCO's work in all eight indicator areas, see Appendix C. This chart is not comprehensive, but does illustrate the kinds of strategies OCO has used in each area and cites examples of its achievements.

2. The data supporting the accomplishments of OCO were gathered during site visits in spring and fall 2000. The report is not comprehensive of all OCO has accomplished, but is intended to illustrate what documentation and measurement of its accomplishments might look like.

The Oakland Community Organizations

The Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) has been active in Oakland for nearly thirty years, and has been affiliated since its inception with the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO), a nationwide network of similar groups. In the beginning, OCO's membership was built through recruitment of individuals from low-income neighborhoods. However, a dozen years ago, OCO shifted from a neighborhood organizing approach to a "faith-based, institutional organizing model," an approach in which congregations are the members of OCO and individuals participate through their membership in one of the member congregations. Each congregation has a "local organizing committee" made up of OCO volunteer leaders.

As of fall 2000, OCO had 38 member congregations representing over 30,000 families from East, West and North Oakland. For the most part, these congregations are located in the Oakland flatlands, which are low- to moderate-income neighborhoods. The majority of the population in these neighborhoods is Latino and African-American; some Asian groups, such as Filipinos and Vietnamese, as well as a small number of Caucasians, are also represented. The shift to faith-based organizing was significant in diversifying OCO's base racially, ethnically, and economically.

OCO staff in spring 2000 included an executive director, three full-time professional organizers, one professional organizer shared with the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools (BayCES), and support staff. The staff is racially and ethnically diverse: the executive director is white; the organizers include two Latinos and one African-American; and the organizer shared with BayCES is white. A Board of Directors representing member congregations governs OCO. Two parent/community leaders, an African-American man and a Latina, are co-chairs of the Board.

The organization works on multiple issues, including affordable housing, crime prevention and safety, drug abuse prevention, and education. The organizing focus is on developing neighborhood leadership and civic participation for the purpose of leveraging resources for Oakland flatlands neighborhoods. Its education organizing began in the early 1990s, first in neighborhood schools, but has expanded to district, city and state levels.

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The Flatlands and Its Schools

"When we walked into the offices of OCO, located in an eerily vacant mall in the middle of the flatlands, the wall map representing the social geography of Oakland immediately drew our attention. The map dramatically pointed out with red pins the concentration of overcrowded schools in low-income flatlands neighborhoods. Six hundred to 1,400 students were typically enrolled in these schools. This contrasted with schools of 250-350 in "the hills," where economically better-off residents live. Student achievement in reading, math, and language arts also dramatically differed. With only a couple of exceptions, fifth graders in hill schools scored above the 60th percentile while flatlands fifth graders tended to score in the 30th percentile and below." RESEARCHER'S FIELDNOTES, SPRING 2000

OCO's base is in the flatlands area of Oakland, historically an African-American community that more recently has become diversified with the arrival of Latino and Asian groups. The neighborhoods' commercial areas reflect a rich mix of ethnicities—Chicano, Mexican, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Cambodian, among others. The majority of flatlands residents are low- to moderate-income. Approximately 50 percent of residents are renters and 50 percent homeowners.

The most common solutions to overcrowding in flatlands schools are the use of temporary classrooms constructed in school playgrounds and year-round multi-tracking. Many of the teachers and parents we interviewed commented on the negative aspects of multi-tracking. For example, many believed that the separation of language groups as a result of differing school calendars undercut the natural mixing of ethnic and racial groups that can occur in school. Despite the fact that many Oakland residents believe that the diversity of the area is a community asset, the organization of the school day and year often separated groups and discouraged cross-cultural exchange. Teachers who "rove" also believed that multi-tracking reduced their sense of efficacy, because they were constantly changing rooms and couldn't create a learning environment reflective of their philosophy and approach. Parents also believed that changing rooms every few months "wasted" valuable time that could be spent on academics.

The Campaign for Small Autonomous Schools

"Our work begins with the pain of our members." OCO ORGANIZER, FALL 2000

"We know there is overcrowding. We know our kids are not reading. We know our kids are falling through the cracks." OCO PARENT LEADER, FALL 2000

In spring 2000, the campaign for small schools was a reform idea taking shape. BayCES had drafted a proposal for a Small Schools Policy, and OCO and BayCES were joined in a partnership to bring clout to the idea. OCO was setting up meetings with elected political and district officials. The work of a shared OCO/BayCES organizer was beginning to bear fruit; there was now a base of vocal Oakland teachers interested in developing small schools and using the principles of small schools to improve their current schools. Teacher support for the small school campaign was helping to erode union resistance. The School Board had appointed a new superintendent who supported the idea of small schools, despite Mayor Jerry Brown's preference for charter schools. In addition, new state money had become available for school construction and Oakland voters had passed a local bond issue freeing funds for the purchase of land and construction of new schools. OCO organizing ensured that the bond issue mandated a priority for new construction in flatlands neighborhoods.

With the arrival of the new superintendent in February 2000, the pace of change began to gather momentum. Although the transition in superintendents initially caused a delay, in May 2000 the School Board, with the new superintendent's support, passed a Small Schools Policy. The Policy included key elements of diverse approaches to reform; the new

small schools would be *autonomous, accountable* for student achievement, and governed by the OUSD *school site decision-making policy.*

In addition, the School Board passed a 24 percent increase in teacher salaries, to be implemented between June 2000 and 2001, in order to attract and retain credentialed teachers in Oakland. The new superintendent started an in-depth examination of principal leadership, which many agreed was weak, and began to make changes in assignment of principals.

As the creation of new small, autonomous schools became more central to the OUSD's plans, the superintendent created an Office for School Reform and hired new staff. In fall 2000, the OUSD's School Reform Office issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to teachers, inviting them to submit designs for small schools. Both the Small Schools Policy and the RFP prominently acknowledged the contribution OCO and BayCES had made to making new small schools a reality. The RFP stated that OCO, BayCES, and the OUSD were working in an official partnership.

OCO's organizing for small schools took place at multiple levels, including political, district and school. Their work, described below, was and continues to be critical to keeping implementation of the policy focused on providing equitable education opportunities for children in the flatlands and ensuring that parents are authentically involved in the reform effort.

Among public school stakeholders, there are different perspectives on OCO as a school reform player. Supporters see OCO as serious about improving the quality of education in the flatlands, while their critics often believe that OCO has jumped from one reform initiative to another without adequate follow-through. When OCO accepted funding from a politically conservative foundation for its charter schools, some thought the organization was acting opportunistically and perhaps even dangerously. Still, critics and supporters agree that OCO is a powerful actor in the school reform arena. Over its decades of organizing, OCO has created a strong base of support in the flatlands and has gained recognition among Oakland political players as a significant force because of its ability to turn out members and hold political leaders accountable.

Indicators and Measures

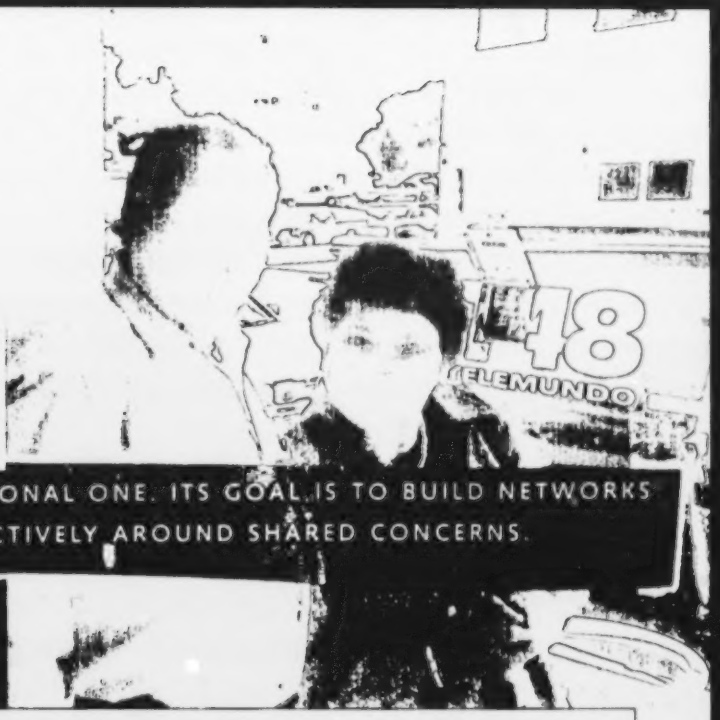
OCO is active in every indicator area. This report discusses OCO's organizing for small schools in relation to four of the eight indicator areas: community power, equity, social capital, and leadership development. We selected these areas because they were particularly salient in both the interviews we conducted and the events we observed during site visits. Archival documentation, including reports and newspaper clippings, supports these as areas of OCO accomplishment.

After two unsuccessful attempts to initiate a small school within Jefferson Elementary School, OCO reassessed its approach and focused on working for policy changes that would enable the development of new small schools. At the time of our visits, a Small Schools Policy was in place and OCO's organizing at the school level was in an early stage. Their efforts focused on supporting design teams for new small schools (and in the case of high schools, small learning communities—the equivalent of small schools at the high school level).

The report begins with an examination of OCO's success in building community power. OCO's work on school reform grows out of and is interconnected with its overall work to improve the flatlands neighborhoods. Over time, OCO's organizing successes have earned it a reputation as a powerful organization because it is able to build relations with political power players, sustain its efforts over time, and win concrete improvements for the community. This report looks at the ways in which OCO is continuing to build its power in order to be effective in the arena of school reform.

Second, the report examines OCO's accomplishments in the area of equity. Our observations and interviews indicated that OCO members look carefully at the differences in the conditions and distribution of resources between flatlands schools and nearby schools serving middle-class and well-to-do families. OCO aims to reduce differences that disadvantage children from low- to moderate-income families. In the area of equity we look at OCO's success in bringing new resources to flatlands schools and reducing overcrowding.

Third, the report considers OCO's success in building social capital. The OCO organizing model is a



THE OCO ORGANIZING MODEL IS A RELATIONAL ONE. ITS GOAL IS TO BUILD NETWORKS OF PEOPLE WHO CAN ACT COLLECTIVELY AROUND SHARED CONCERNS.

relational one. Its goal is to build networks of people who can act collectively around shared concerns. OCO builds social capital by creating opportunities for people who might not otherwise come together to unite around their shared interests, which builds trust and reciprocity among these groups. OCO members also build relationships across differently positioned stakeholders in public education. Its relationships with district and city officials broaden accountability for public education.

Lastly, the report examines the area of leadership development. One of the primary tasks of community organizing is to develop leaders, both in the community and in schools. By having strong leaders from the community, an organization can ensure that it stays focused on the concerns of low- to moderate-income families. In the area of leadership development, we discuss the leadership opportunities created by OCO's education organizing and the ways in which these opportunities contribute to improving flatlands schools.

First Indicator Area: Community Power

OCO's partnership with BayCES, its *role in implementing small schools*, which gives it a "seat at the table," and its *large turnout* at school-related public actions are all evidence of the community power that OCO is building to effect school reform. OCO's capacity to demonstrate community power ensures that the voices and values of OCO members are integral to school reform in Oakland.

The OCO/BayCES Partnership

"The morning of the announcement of the Gates Foundation Award of $15.7 million for implementation of small schools and high school small learning communities, the Gates representative started his speech with the question, "Why start here [in Oakland] giving money for small schools?" Answering his own question, he stated, "Because of great leadership in the school, city, the non-profits, and the community. The necessary groundwork has been laid." OCO and BayCES were mentioned several times as part of that leadership and representatives from both groups spoke at the event. The central role of the BayCES/OCO partnership in bringing the Gates money to Oakland could not be missed." RESEARCHER'S FIELDNOTES, FALL 2000

The OCO/BayCES partnership is central to catalyzing and sustaining the effort to make new small autonomous schools a central aspect of Oakland school reform. OCO brings to the effort an organized community and relationships with elected leaders, as well as an organizing practice that stresses the building of relationships around shared interests. BayCES brings its insider knowledge of the school district and its history of capacity building among educators. The ability to form strong partnerships demonstrates OCO's power, because it means that other groups recognize the strengths of OCO and want to work with it and because partnerships are a means to leveraging the scale of impact and extending the expertise of any single group.

Through our documentation, several measures of the strength and impact of the OCO/BayCES partnership emerged.

- The partnership is building significant support for small schools. OCO has led the effort to meet with every political leader, every School Board member, and the mayor about small schools. An organizer hired jointly by the two groups met one-on-one with 400 teachers, creating a base of teacher support for small schools that has helped to reverse overt union opposition. BayCES has used its familiarity with those inside the system to win their confidence. Although not all Oakland public school stakeholders favored small schools as a reform strategy, the Gates Foundation's award for small schools was recognition of the growing momentum around this strategy for school improvement.
- The OCO/BayCES partnership is successfully building a collaborative relationship with the OUSD. OCO and BayCES consider themselves in partnership with the Office for School Reform in the implementation of new small schools and high school small learning communities. Both BayCES and OCO are acknowledged in OUSD documents as instrumental to the establishment of the Small Schools Policy and a continuing resource to teachers and parents in the development of new small schools.
- BayCES has established a new branch of work, the Community Partnership Academy, with responsibility for working with organizations like OCO. This reflects the value BayCES now places on collaborating with a well-organized community.
- OCO and BayCES have shown a commitment to engage with each other over time, despite the tensions inherent in partnership relations, and are having a mutual influence on one another. The result of this important and difficult organizational work is that school reform and community/parent engagement are becoming more integrated. OCO organizers say that they are now drawing on the BayCES practice of utilizing data-driven inquiry in order to help their members examine schools and make decisions about areas for change. BayCES sees that its exposure to community organizing practice is bringing about a transformation in its approach to "coaching" individual teachers and groups of teachers. Whereas BayCES once avoided disagreement and sought consensus, they have learned to see the value in encouraging the expression of multiple viewpoints. This has encouraged more widespread participation among teachers. BayCES is beginning to bring elements of community organizing practice into their work, as they look for opportunities to bring teachers and others together around shared interests for the purpose of acting together to bring about change. OCO's influence on BayCES is particularly significant, because BayCES is part of a national network of school reformers and can have a wide impact on the thinking about parent and community roles in school reform. As one BayCES staff member explained,

"You know...we talk about community connection. But it has been relatively narrowly defined. And we, I think, have expanded considerably our thinking about what it means to connect with the community...how to make those connections to get what you want in terms of moving reform forward....To actually be in it and see the power of it, it's quite extraordinary. And I would argue that most of our colleagues around the country don't get it."

OCO's "Insider/Outsider" Role in Implementing Small Schools

Community groups are traditionally positioned as "outsiders" to schools and school reform. However, as a result of OCO's partnerships with BayCES and

the OUSD and its work with the union, OCO's role has extended beyond the traditional outsider role of mobilizing political will and holding politicians and educators accountable for results. Now that the Small Schools Policy is in place, OCO serves both as an "insider" and as an "outsider" in the review of small school design proposals and in the implementation of new small schools. For example, OCO is deeply involved in organizing teachers in overcrowded schools into small school design teams and also in challenging those teachers to listen to and include parents in planning for small schools. Interviews with parents and observations of design team meetings indicate that OCO staff members are also critical supports to parent leaders as they learn to work with school professionals in developing designs for new small schools.

Turnout

There is wide agreement that OCO's ability to turn out its members represents community power. Numerous interviewees commented that political leaders, the mayor, the superintendent, other policy and decision-makers, and the media show up at OCO actions because the turnout is strong. Political and other leaders are more likely to pay attention to communities when strong turnout shows that the residents are politically aware and active. Arguably, the ability to turn out members was one reason BayCES wanted to partner with OCO and was a major way in which OCO earned a seat "at the table." As one organizer explained to a group of parent leaders, *"Our ability to turn out high numbers is the way we counterbalance the power of those who hold positions of authority."*

As an example, in fall 2000, OCO held a local action demanding that the city and district keep their promise to put two new small schools on the land where Montgomery Ward had been located and not relinquish part of the land to developers for commercial use. (For the story of Montgomery Ward, see pp. 14. The turnout at this event was over 1,000 and the media covered it as a citywide event because, as one organizer explained, *"They did not believe that a neighborhood event could have such high numbers."* Both the superintendent and the mayor attended, another reason the media interpreted it as a citywide rather than neighborhood action. One of the accomplishments of that action was that the mayor and superintendent, who were at odds over small schools because of the mayor's preference for charter schools, agreed to meet and talk. The ability of OCO to push for a relationship between the mayor and superintendent is critical because each is critical to the development of new small schools.

POLITICAL LEADERS, THE MAYOR, THE SUPERINTENDENT, OTHER POLICY AND DECISION-MAKERS, AND THE MEDIA SHOW UP AT OCO ACTIONS BECAUSE THE TURNOUT IS STRONG.

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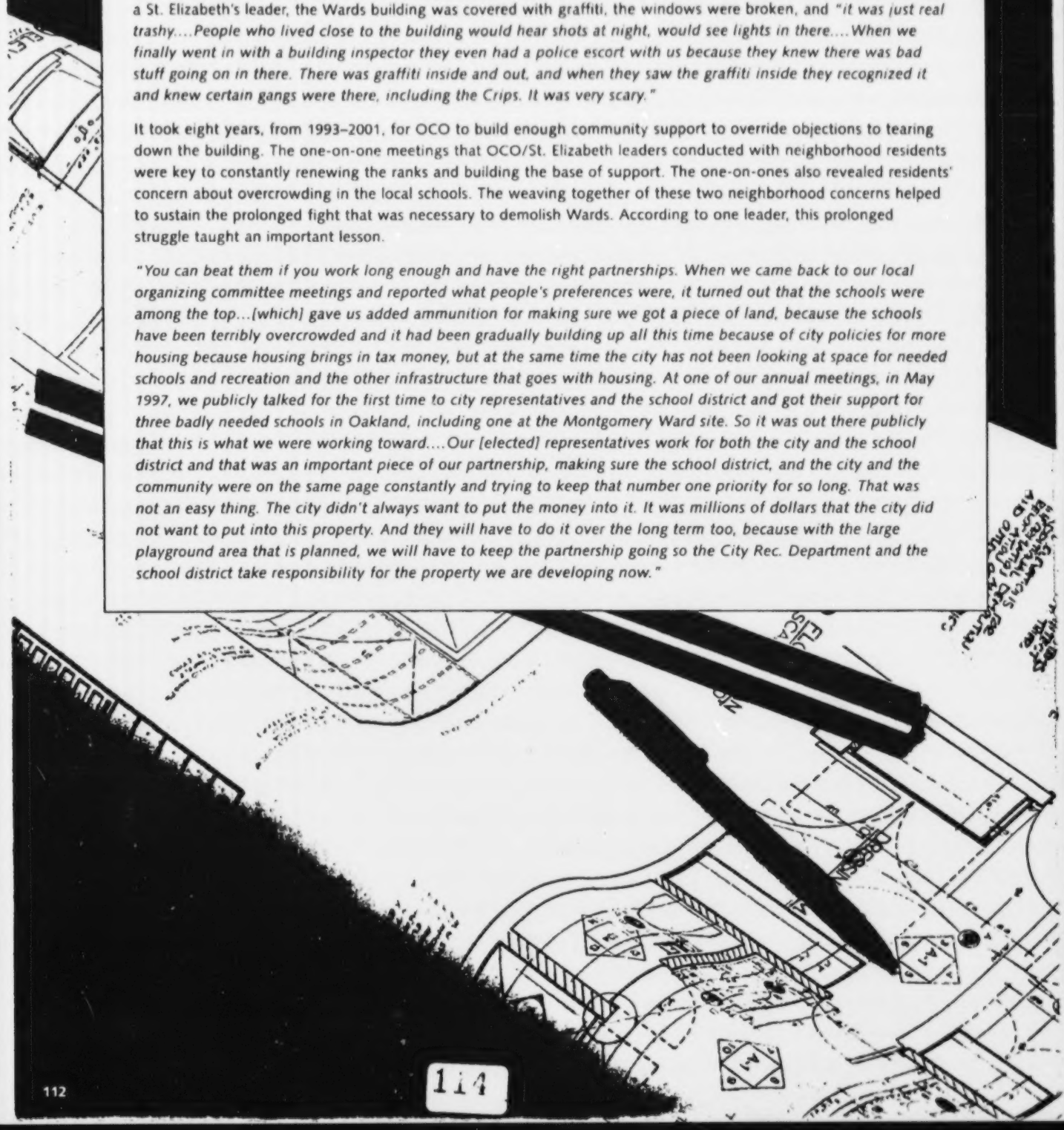
Saving the Montgomery Ward site as a place for two new small schools. "We were able to take on the big fight and win."

In 1986, Montgomery Ward, which for over a half a century had been providing short-term and career employment to many Oakland residents, abandoned its mail order store and warehouse in Oakland. Several years earlier, Mobil Oil had bought out the company, which marked the beginning of the dismantlement of the company and the deterioration of the building. By 1993, leaders in an OCO local organizing committee at St. Elizabeth's parish were hearing concerns about the condition of the building from community residents in their one-on-one meetings. According to a St. Elizabeth's leader, the Wards building was covered with graffiti, the windows were broken, and *"it was just real trashy....People who lived close to the building would hear shots at night, would see lights in there....When we finally went in with a building inspector they even had a police escort with us because they knew there was bad stuff going on in there. There was graffiti inside and out, and when they saw the graffiti inside they recognized it and knew certain gangs were there, including the Crips. It was very scary."*

It took eight years, from 1993–2001, for OCO to build enough community support to override objections to tearing down the building. The one-on-one meetings that OCO/St. Elizabeth leaders conducted with neighborhood residents were key to constantly renewing the ranks and building the base of support. The one-on-ones also revealed residents' concern about overcrowding in the local schools. The weaving together of these two neighborhood concerns helped to sustain the prolonged fight that was necessary to demolish Wards. According to one leader, this prolonged struggle taught an important lesson.

"You can beat them if you work long enough and have the right partnerships. When we came back to our local organizing committee meetings and reported what people's preferences were, it turned out that the schools were among the top...[which] gave us added ammunition for making sure we got a piece of land, because the schools have been terribly overcrowded and it had been gradually building up all this time because of city policies for more housing because housing brings in tax money, but at the same time the city has not been looking at space for needed schools and recreation and the other infrastructure that goes with housing. At one of our annual meetings, in May 1997, we publicly talked for the first time to city representatives and the school district and got their support for three badly needed schools in Oakland, including one at the Montgomery Ward site. So it was out there publicly that this is what we were working toward....Our [elected] representatives work for both the city and the school district and that was an important piece of our partnership, making sure the school district, and the city and the community were on the same page constantly and trying to keep that number one priority for so long. That was not an easy thing. The city didn't always want to put the money into it. It was millions of dollars that the city did not want to put into this property. And they will have to do it over the long term too, because with the large playground area that is planned, we will have to keep the partnership going so the City Rec. Department and the school district take responsibility for the property we are developing now."



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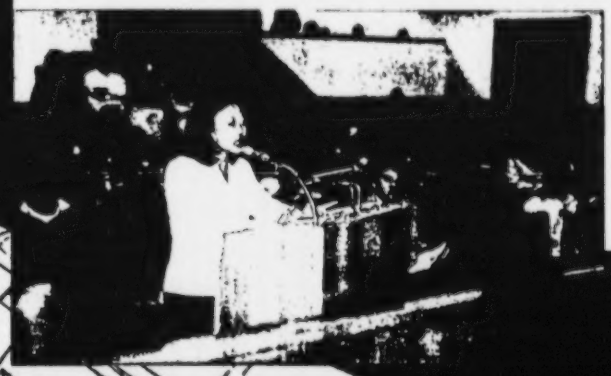
The conflict between corporate interests and local interests also became apparent to OCO/St. Elizabeth leaders through their research on the causes to the Wards problem. Their research showed that while the corporate officers of Wards were neglecting the building in Oakland and telling OCO members that they lacked the resources to tear down the building, the company was buying up chain stores throughout the Northeast. *"We knew money wasn't the problem. Although the building was for sale, it was as though they were deliberately letting it run down."* The leaders learned that developers were trying to ensure commercial development at the Wards site. Every time the leaders thought they were close to having the building demolished, they would meet new obstacles, often lawsuits launched by developers. *"It was such hard work for eight long years. And we knew there was outside money paying for all these lawsuits...So, we knew there was some kind of big money out there that had different interests than our own. And it was basically the developer interests that were out there....This was a big demonstration of the money power that is out there."* To the surprise of many, a splinter group of preservationists who claimed Wards was a historic building made common cause with the developers in opposing its destruction, despite its complete deterioration.

Over time, the use of the Wards site grew from a neighborhood issue to a citywide OCO issue. Fifteen hundred petitions supporting demolition of the building were sent to Wards headquarters in Chicago. Over 2,000 postcards were sent to the preservationists who opposed demolition. Leaders attended meeting after meeting with officials at city, school district, and state levels in order to make their concerns known and to find out where each of them stood and how they would help. Leaders regularly pulled together small and large groups of people to sit in courtrooms and monitor the proceedings of lawsuits, to accompany the city inspector into the building, and to take photos of the site to monitor the demolition. *"Every step along the way, we had to lobby each voting body, member by member, to find out where they stood on a particular Wards related issue before them, work to secure their support for our position, and secure their vote that would ultimately bring down the building and make way for the new schools....We kept pulling together hundreds and thousands of people and we had to stay on top of all the details.*



In February 2001, developers made a last ditch legal effort to obtain a "stay" of demolition until all other alternatives were explored. But the community, city and school district were speaking with one voice, and the court said "no." The wrecking ball finally brought the building down, and temporary classrooms have been put in its place while plans move ahead for new small schools.

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Second Indicator Area: Equity

OCO believes that all its work is directed toward obtaining equity for low- to- moderate-income families; in the case of school reform, that means ensuring that children who attend flatlands schools have as good a chance at academic success as their peers attending hill schools. Two areas of OCO achievement provide good measures of OCO's success in making schools more equitable: their campaign to make *reducing overcrowding and ending multi-tracking* high priorities in the District; and their efforts to obtain *incentives to attract and keep qualified teachers in flatlands schools.*

Reducing Overcrowding and Ending Multi-tracking

OCO's campaign to reduce overcrowding and end multi-tracking reflects its commitment to help low-income neighborhoods fight for their fair share of resources. An interview with a newly elected school board member poignantly stated the issue, *"I see [ending] overcrowding as where we should begin reform. It [overcrowding] tells a lot about which children are valued."*

OCO has kept the issues of overcrowding and multi-tracking prominent by pushing the district to make a priority of ending these conditions and by linking these goals to the small schools campaign and OCO charter schools. Some of the measures of OCO's success include:

- reduced overcrowding in flatlands schools. The opening of the Woodland small school (an outcome of joint work by ACORN and OCO) in fall 2000 took pressure off other nearby schools.
- an end to multi-tracking in most Oakland schools. OCO parents pushed for an end to multi-tracking, which the district subsequently terminated in seven of eight schools. In a focus group with several teachers and a parent at one elementary school, teachers commented that the change was having a positive impact on student learning. Teachers across a grade level are now able to plan together because they and their students are all in school at the same time. The teachers are looking for opportunities to mix children from different language groups, which they believe will strengthen both the school program and the neighborhood as children learn to interact with each other and appreciate each other's cultural heritage. Teachers are devoting more effort to decorating classrooms and improving hallway bulletin boards as they develop a sense of ownership of their space and responsibility for it.
- funding for small schools in the flatlands. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded BayCES $15.7 million over 5 years for implementation of small schools ($10.7 million for Oakland) and the Federal Government has granted the OUSD $1.45 million for implementation of small learning communities at the high school level. Because of OCO's success in promoting new small schools as a strategy to relieve overcrowding and end multi-tracking, flatlands neighborhoods are prioritized for receiving this funding. In addition, when the OUSD wanted a school bond passed to match dollars coming from the state for new school construction, OCO mobilized to ensure that the bond would mandate a high priority for land purchases and construction of new small schools in flatlands neighborhoods.

Incentives to Attract and Keep Qualified Teachers in Flatlands Schools

Many schools in low-income neighborhoods, including flatlands schools, have a pattern of high teacher turnover and disproportionate numbers of substitutes and/or non-credentialed teachers. In summer 2000, in recognition of the relationship between low salaries and high teacher turnover, the Oakland School Board approved a significant salary increase for teachers.

The small schools campaign may well serve as another incentive for teachers to stay in flatlands schools. The process of developing small schools offers professional development opportunities for teachers through their participation in the small schools incubator workshops and on design teams. The major role teachers have in envisioning new small schools reflects respect for their ideas and experience.

The first small school, the Woodland School, was established as a superintendent's pilot in fall 2000. During the first round of preparation for new small schools in winter and spring 2001, there were ten design teams with approximately fifty teachers participating in either the incubator or design team workshops. Out of this process, five new small

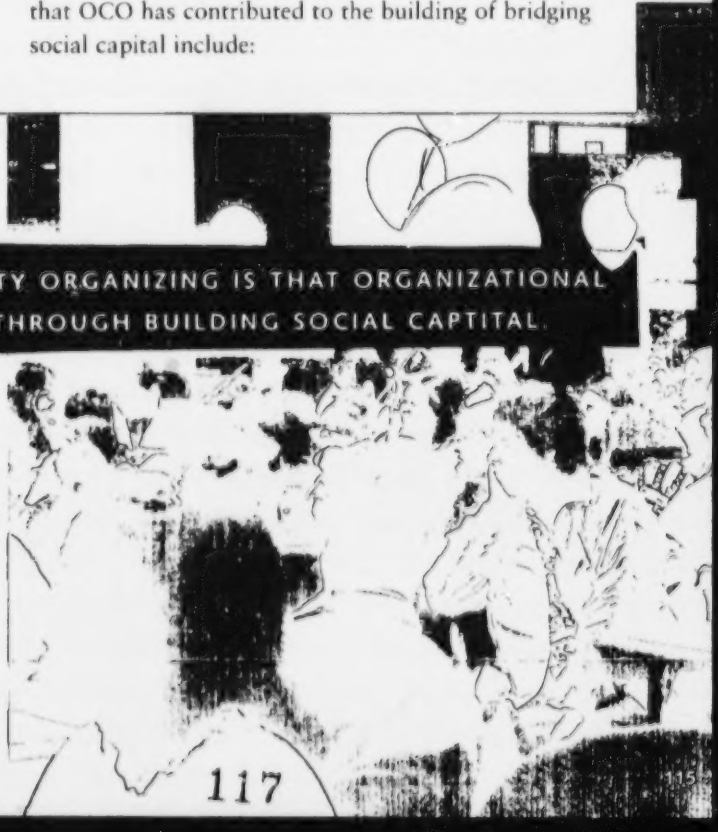
schools were approved for start up in fall 2001. Although it is currently too early to know about rates of teacher turnover in these schools, retention of teachers over time will be one important measure of the impact of small schools in the flatlands. Presumably, providing opportunities for teachers to engage in birthing new schools and reforming existing schools will help attract and retain experienced teachers. Since the flatlands are prioritized for new small schools, this should help raise the quality of teaching staff in this area.

Third Indicator Area: Social Capital

A fundamental premise of community organizing is that organizational and political strength comes through building "social capital"—strong networks of people who can act together around shared concerns. OCO, similar to other groups that follow a faith-based institutional model of community organizing, draws on the existing relationships of trust and reciprocity among congregation members. Through one-on-one and small group meetings, this trust is strengthened as members talk together about their concerns. Leaders and organizers report on their one-on-ones at monthly meetings of their congregation- based local organizing committees and it is here that they identify concerns shared by neighborhood residents. One OCO leader explained the process and effect of relationship building this way.

"The one-on-one interview process is an integral part of OCO organizing. That is where issues surface—people will talk more about what concerns them in one-on-one interviews than in larger meetings. This one-on-one process is also the beginning of the relationship-building that brings about the solidarity of the group. OCO leaders build up the strength of the organization by bringing new folks into the working body. And larger meetings are pulled together through drawing on these relationships to work together on the common issues."

In addition to strengthening relations among group members, OCO creates opportunities for building "bridging" social capital (relationships across diverse groups). For example, parents, teachers, and school board members traveled together to visit small schools in New York and Chicago. This created a shared set of experiences and visions of the possibilities of small schools. Building bridging social capital is an important measure of success in community organizing because it can unify diverse neighborhoods and institutions, helping them to speak with one voice around shared concerns. Some examples of the ways that OCO has contributed to the building of bridging social capital include:



A FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IS THAT ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLICTICAL STRENGTH COMES THROUGH BUILDING SOCIAL CAPTITAL.

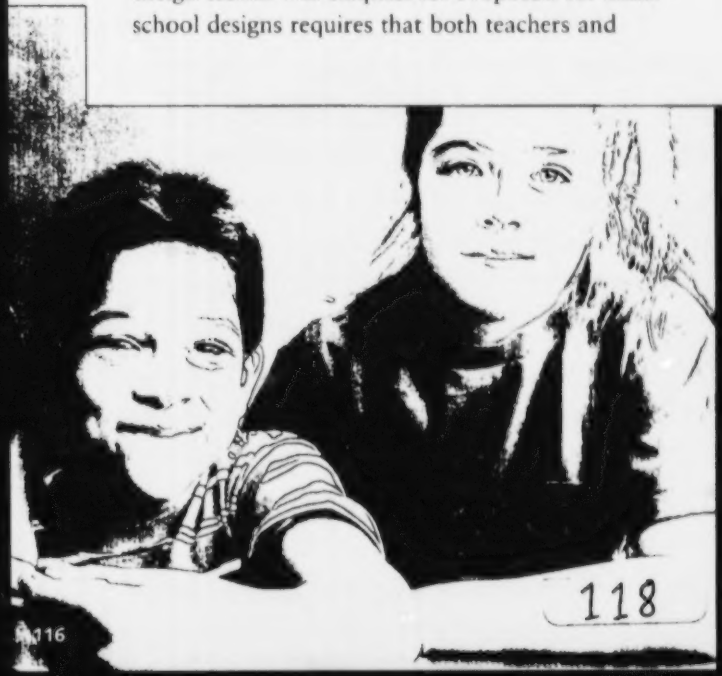
- home visits by teachers after PICO training sessions. In summer 2000, teachers who volunteered to teach at Woodland attended PICO training on making home visits. During the 2000-01 school year, all Woodland teachers conducted home visits. In interviews, several reported that the training and the subsequent home visits they made have turned around their relationships with the parents of their students. One teacher commented,

"My first year of teaching was at a large elementary school. I felt the parents rushed me that year. My second year teaching was a rough year. I felt I had little connection to the parents. When I came here, I went to [PICO parent] training in Sacramento. I returned and started home visits right way. It has made a big difference. I did not realize the roles parents could take in the classroom. I am making a different kind of connection with the parents. I tell them about my program and that the campus is open. I ask them to tell me stories about their child and about their aspirations for their child. The parents were stunned. This is usually just not done. But now they feel part of the process."

- joint parent/teacher participation on small school design teams. The Request for Proposals for small school designs requires that both teachers and parents participate on the design team. OCO has insisted that parent participation be required in order to ensure that new small schools attend to parents' goals and expectations for their children. Each team represents the possibility for unprecedented levels of parent/teacher exchange about their visions for a caring and academically challenging school. One of the criteria for approval of a new small school design is the level of parent participation in the design process and plans for parent involvement in implementation of the design. This collaboration between parents and teachers, and the extent to which parents believe their ideas are respected and influential, are measures of OCO's success in making the boundaries between families and schools more porous and flexible.

- evaluation of public actions. As an RFA researcher described one evaluation session,

"A group of twenty-five parents and half a dozen others—organizers, a pastor, a principal, several teachers and observers like myself—gathered in a school classroom for an evaluation of a recent OCO public action. The parents were African-American, Latino, Filipino, and Vietnamese. Simultaneous translation in three languages—English, Vietnamese, and Spanish—was ongoing throughout the meeting, and at one point parents from the three language groups broke down to meet and talk among themselves. When the organizer



opened the meeting, she pointed out that the neighborhood group, Roosevelt Village Center (RVC), which is a partner group to OCO, was able to organize similarly to OCO for the public event, helping to make it a success. She stated, "RVC seems like a group like our well organized churches. We have youth groups, choirs and adult study groups, and our leaders can go to all of them and bring them out for our actions. Similarly, RVC leaders were able to go to the participants in their enrichment, counseling, and tutoring programs and bring them out for the event."

RESEARCHER'S FIELDNOTES, FALL 2000

The OCO public action evaluation brought together groups of people who normally do not have many opportunities for interaction, due to language barriers and membership in different cultural, neighborhood, and religious organizations. Through the evaluation process, OCO organizers assisted people from the different groups in developing a shared understanding of the purpose of and process for the public action: evaluation was a site for building relationships across cultural groups, for generating a sense of shared self-interest, and for furthering the capacity of the groups to act collectively around a common cause.

- regular meetings with public officials. OCO leaders regularly meet with elected and district officials to discuss their concerns and to find out where officials stand on issues that affect them. The relationships they develop in the course of one campaign, for example around neighborhood crime, often carry over to other efforts, such as support for small schools. One leader told us that she had met so often with one of her elected representatives that he had given her a cell phone number that she could use to reach him anytime. Opportunities for school board members and district officials to go with OCO members and teachers to visit small schools in other cities have been, as mentioned above, a key strategy to deepen relationships among parents, teachers, and district officials around school issues. The trips provided opportunities for public debate and the formation of a shared vision that facilitates action.

Fourth Indicator Area: Leadership Development

The power of community organizing groups is created through the development of leaders who keep the groups focused and moving forward on issues that have the highest priority for the community. As one OCO organizer explained, "*Our power comes from our leaders. Our power is based upon us staying true to the values of our leaders.*" Echoing this sentiment, a parent leader reflected, "*Our power comes from staying true to our values, not from things like being asked to sit on the Mayor's Commission [for Public Education].*" Without strong neighborhood leaders, community organizing groups would lose their authority and power. OCO's success in leadership development can be seen in the opportunities it provides its leaders for *learning the skills of organizing* and *taking on new public roles.*

Learning New Skills and Building Individual Capacity

Leaders are community members who learn the skills of organizing through the coaching of organizers and participation in local organizing committees and OCO campaigns. In interviews, leaders often say that the process of becoming leaders has reduced their sense of isolation and vulnerability. They also experience an enhanced confidence through being part of a group that can analyze situations and make strategic decisions to take actions that will result in concrete gains.

The story of one parent leader is typical. She related that she had been an active member of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and the school site council before becoming active in OCO. She found, however, that despite her participation in these school-based groups, she was isolated and could not get much done. For example, when she tried to question a school budget decision, the principal and her administrative staff reacted by bringing together an opposing group of parents who "*blasted*" her. She said,

"I didn't have power and I didn't know how to organize...I was pretty much at the school site by myself....Only after I attended a meeting at my church where I was invited by an OCO parent leader did I see what I had

never seen before. There were about twelve parents in the room and they were talking honestly about problems at the school. And they were valid problems. And the parents were discussing school issues in an organized way, with the OCO leader and organizer leading the meeting...I realized that this was something very different because it was not run by the school administration. That people weren't afraid here to speak out."

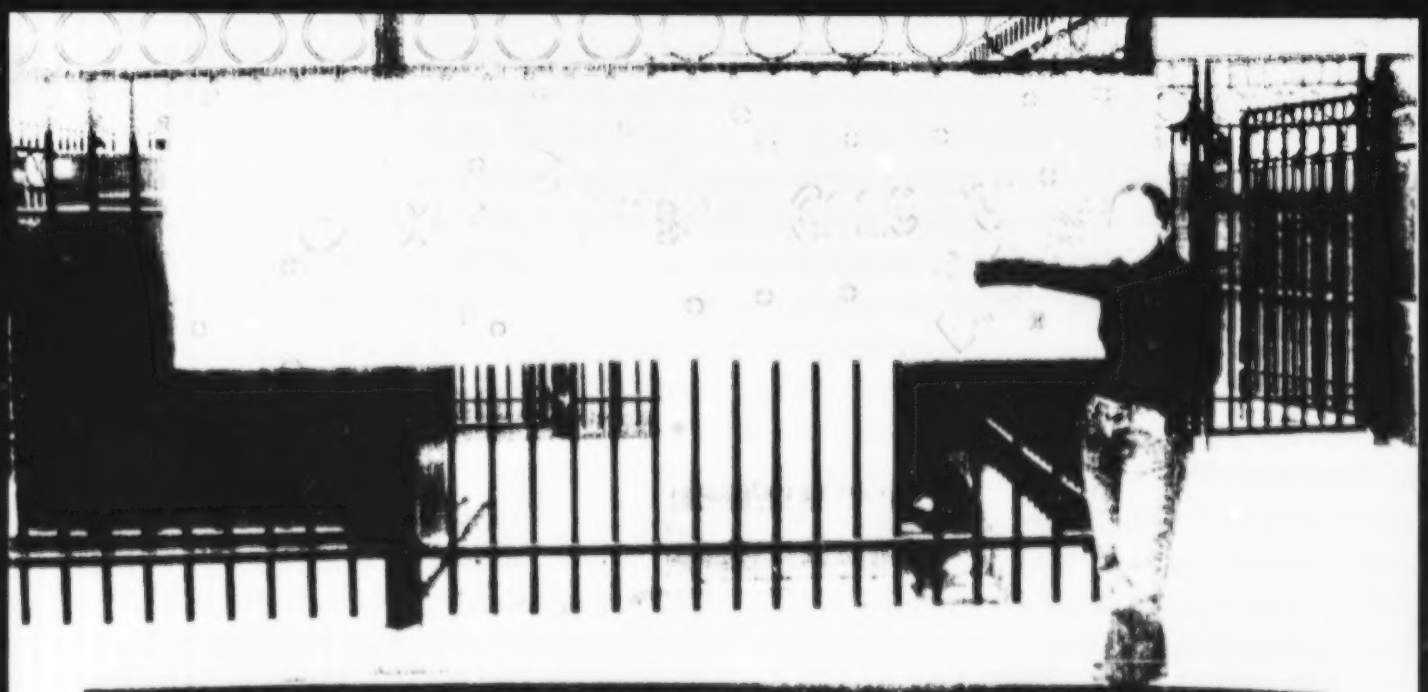
This parent leader said that several meetings later she was approached to co-chair the next meeting. She said this was hard because it was new to her. When she was a PTA and school council member, the administration had always run meetings. In working with OCO she learned how to lead meetings, because the organizer sat down with her beforehand and went over the agenda and everything that would happen. After several experiences of co-chairing, she said she became *"more comfortable."* She then began going with other leaders and organizers to speak with district officials and elected leaders, whom she got to know *"real well...The organizer helps us learn how to build these relationships."*

The parents in this group eventually created a mission statement and decided on three priorities for their work at the local school: academic performance, safety, and cleanliness. The organizer helped the parents develop strategies for dealing with the issues, e.g., demanding standards for academic performance, meeting with the local police about safety, and organizing quarterly beautification days. The parents then made a presentation to the principal and vice principal. Again, the parent leader reported that this was a new experience, but that even the principal was *"real impressed because we were so organized"* and because they offered strategies for dealing with their concerns.

Despite the strategies, they found that they made little progress on their issues. The organizing process of holding research meetings helped them to understand some of the obstacles to bringing about change. For example, in meeting with the custodians they learned that it was difficult to keep the bathrooms clean because they were overused. In meeting with teachers, they learned the difficulties of communicating shared standards across a faculty of seventy teachers when there was little opportunity for interaction. From these experiences, they came to see that the larger issue was overcrowding. The organizer gave them a book about small schools, and through discussion of the book and subsequent visits to small schools, they came to see that smaller schools could provide better learning environments.

Similar experiences of "organizing as learning" are echoed by another community leader. This leader describes how the Montgomery Ward campaign (to have the Ward's building demolished and the site dedicated to new small schools) provided multiple opportunities for learning organizing skills.

"Every step along the way, we had to lobby each voting body, member by member, to find out where they stood on a particular Wards-related issue before them, work to secure their support for our position, and secure their vote that would ultimately bring down the building and make way for the new schools. This meant lots of testimony and calling on the active support of the entire OCO federation, our leaders and supporters citywide, in a show of our solidarity and determination to see that land would be cleared and more classrooms built in its place. All these research meetings and actions and the work and training they



THE ORGANIZATIONAL WORK OF OCO IS NOT ONLY TO TRAIN LEADERS, BUT ALSO TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERS TO TAKE ON NEW PUBLIC ROLES.

necessitated, became a veritable leadership "classroom" for new and emerging leaders as well as for experienced leaders."

In addition to learning through experience and the ongoing support and coaching of organizers, OCO leaders have opportunities to gain skills through PICO leadership training (a week-long intensive program) and through the reflection and evaluation sessions that follow public actions.

Taking on New Public Roles

The organizational work of OCO is not only to train leaders, but also to create opportunities for leaders to take on new public roles in schools, in OCO campaigns, and in organizational governance. OCO leaders experience new roles at the local school level and in relation to teachers through their participation on design teams for new small schools. OCO helps to prepare parent leaders for this work through special incubator workshops and organizers' ongoing support. Members can also hone the skills of public conversation through taking on leadership roles at evaluation and reflection sessions. One OCO leader was invited to serve on the Mayor's Commission for Education.

The OCO Board is made up of leaders from the local organizing committees and is co-chaired by OCO parent/community leaders. Board co-chairs often take their skill in holding public conversation to new levels when they represent the organization at public events, such as when the co-chairs spoke at the Gates Award ceremony. Here, and at other public meetings, parent leaders tell their stories and represent the shared interests and concerns of OCO members.

OCO events have been covered by cable TV, the press, and other media, and leaders are often called upon to speak publicly as a result of this coverage. The struggle to demolish Montgomery Ward brought leaders face-to-face with corporate leaders, with city managers, and with elected leaders. Of such public roles, one leader commented,

"Armed with all the facts, willing to do the work and to testify on our own behalf, and strengthened with the knowledge that none of us stands alone, through our organized efforts we know we can win many victories."

Future Directions

As this report illustrates, OCO has many accomplishments resulting from its school reform organizing. OCO organizers and leaders agree, however, that each achievement has led to new challenges. Challenges for the future fall into two broad interrelated categories: *building organizational capacity* and *furthering school reform by building relationships with educators*. In the area of organizational capacity, OCO faces challenges in staffing, volunteers, funding, and working through the inevitable tensions of partnerships. In the arena of its relationships with educators and to school reform, the challenges include: managing an insider/outsider status; keeping parents central to the school change process; creating a formal connection between OCO and new small schools; engaging principals; and extending OCO organizing to the high school level. The report concludes with a brief discussion of these challenges.

Organizational Capacity: Staffing, Volunteers, Partnerships, and Funding

As the momentum for new small schools mounts, OCO's work grows in complexity. Its organizing takes place on many fronts: in complex partnerships with BayCES and the Oakland Unified School District; in supporting parents and teachers working on the design of new small schools; in providing support to the planning for the first small learning communities in high schools; in supporting the implementation of the first cohort of small schools; and in locating and fighting for land for new small schools. In addition, OCO has a commitment to its charter schools; many of the first charters are elementary schools, and OCO parents whose children have gone through elementary charters want to find ways of extending charter schools to the upper grades.

Working in all these contexts and at all these levels simultaneously demands additional staffing as well as a solid group of volunteer leaders, whose skills and knowledge need to be constantly growing to handle work in new arenas. It also requires new strategies for working with partners, in order to clarify responsibilities as the work diversifies. One OCO leader summed up the challenge of managing success in saying that, because of its accomplishments, OCO is now *"stretched"* and needs to build the capacity to *"operate across a lot of levels of change."*

In order to provide training to leaders at the scale it needs, OCO requested that its national network, PICO, provide a modified leadership institute close to Oakland, so more of its leaders could attend. OCO is also aiming to build its staff of organizers; one parent leader took a leave of absence from her job to join the staff as an organizer for six months. OCO and BayCES continue to work on their partnership relationship, and each is assessing the new demands that arise from the constantly evolving situation. For example, OCO is now looking toward a formal agreement with existing schools and new small schools so that organizing will be part of the process of change in schools. BayCES is considering how to expand its staffing in order to extend its work to the high school level. Although OCO has accomplished a great deal with a relatively small staff and modest budget, its funding base now needs to grow sufficiently to support additional experienced organizers and to develop leaders who can carry on the expansion and deepening of its efforts.

Furthering School Reform by Building Relationships with Educators

Managing the Tension of the "Insider/Outsider" Relationship

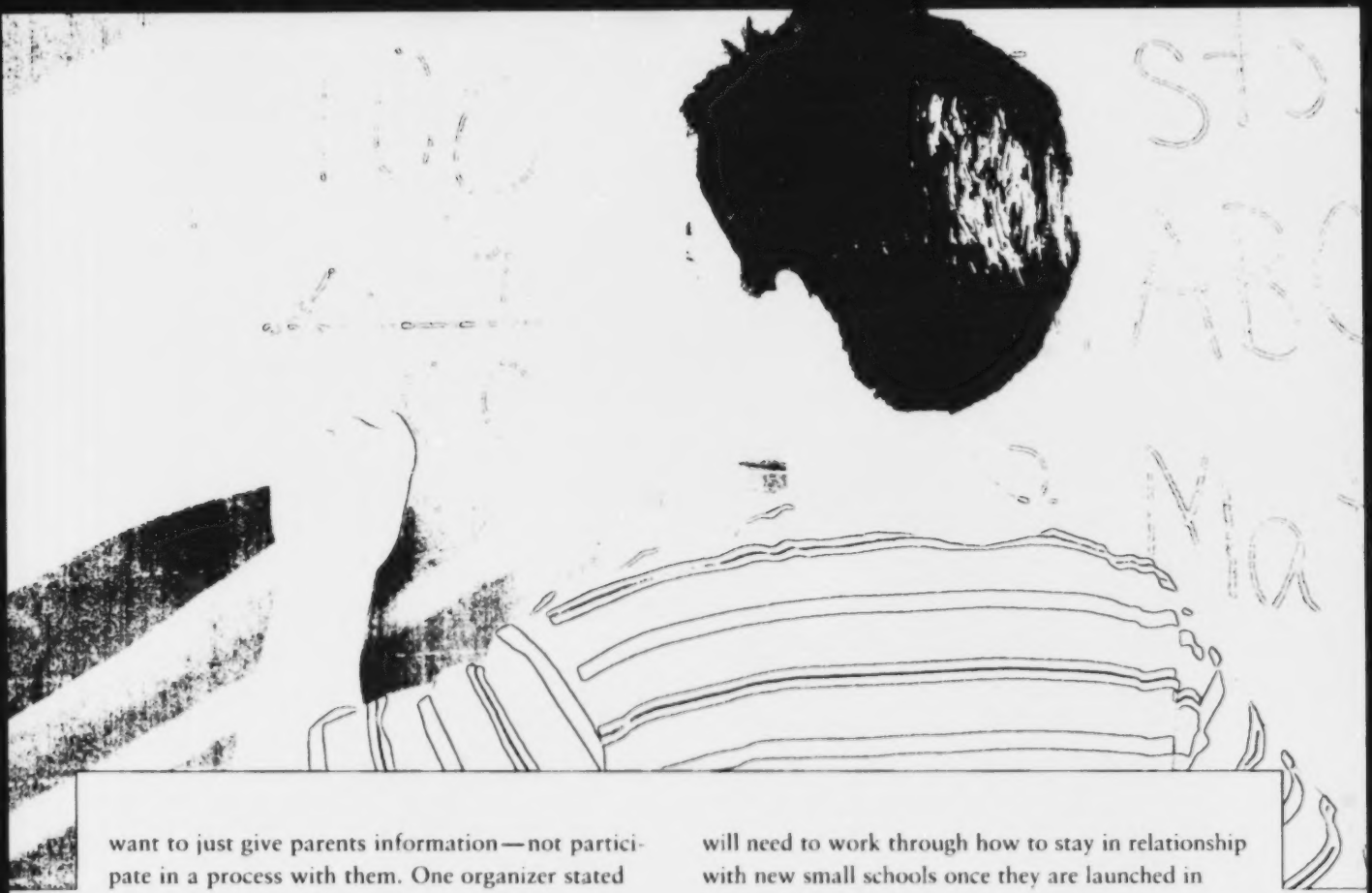
OCO's power as a community organization—its ability to catalyze change and sustain pressure over time—has earned it an "insider" role in shaping the design and implementation of small schools. This is a new role for OCO, which, in the past, has been an "outsider" with the distinct function of putting pressure on the system. Now the challenge for OCO is to manage a balance between building a relationship with the district to implement reform and maintaining its independence. OCO needs this independence in order to be able to hold its "partner" accountable for providing teachers and principals with the support they need to be successful and ultimately for ensuring that children in flatlands schools attain a high level of academic achievement.

One of OCO's lead organizers stated that the key to OCO's success in balancing its insider/outsider status is to *"stay sensitive to the local....Each [of the partners] is being driven by the place from which we operate....Our work is driven by the parents we organize. We are coming from the needs of our parents, that is what drives our perspective. And it gives us a sense of urgency."* Nonetheless, school systems have proved powerful in pulling people into their agendas and OCO will need to work to maintain its role as a "critical friend." Even though OCO, BayCES, and the district have many areas in which they can complement one another as the work around small schools moves forward, the ability to work through the tensions and conflicts that come from differing vantage points will remain a challenge.

Keeping Parents Central to the Change Process

In the first years of the OCO/BayCES partnership, OCO members were organizing to get a Small Schools Policy passed. Everyone that we interviewed agrees that it is critical for OCO to continue organizing at the political level—that without OCO's involvement the fight for land for new small schools, for instance, will not be won. OCO's work has expanded, however, to include planning and implementation of new small schools. As the campaign has moved closer to the school level, the participation of parents becomes a greater challenge. Education professionals are not used to parents assuming substantial roles in setting education goals and designing schools, and most parents are not experienced at participating with teachers and administrators in a planning process. Involvement of parents and teachers in the design and implementation of small schools is new for both, and everyone involved—parent leaders, organizers, teachers, and principals—has much to learn about what it will take to work together successfully.

OCO has helped to assure that parent perspectives are incorporated in the designs of small schools through the requirement in the RFP that parents participate in the design process. Nonetheless, it takes strong leaders and skillful organizers to make sure that participation is authentic. Parents need support and encouragement to speak out in a group of professionals. On the other hand, teachers often



want to just give parents information—not participate in a process with them. One organizer stated that she found that the teacher/parent relationship started to shift when she told the teachers *"when you are struggling, you have to let the parents struggle with you, be shoulder to shoulder with you."* Finding ways to open up relationships that are traditionally narrow and limited will be a challenge as more and more teachers and parents go into the design process and as new small schools open.

Keeping Teachers and New Small Schools Connected to OCO

OCO has organized teachers to support policy changes leading to new small schools, but so far there is not a clear institutional connection between OCO and teachers or small schools once the work is at the school level. OCO has a partnership with the OUSD at the District level, and is now proposing a formal agreement between new small schools and OCO that would build a connection at the local level and legitimize OCO organizing at school sites. The current relationship between new small schools and OCO is in a trial phase. At Woodland School, for example, OCO has continued working with teachers, helping teachers develop their capacity for connecting with parents through PICO training in home visits. OCO will need to work through how to stay in relationship with new small schools once they are launched in order to build the leadership among parents, teachers, and principals needed to carry the work forward.

Engaging Principals

In order to gain support for a Small Schools Policy, OCO and its partner BayCES have worked intensively with teachers, but not with principals. OCO believed, in general, school leadership was weak at the principal level. When the new superintendent arrived and adopted small schools as a strategy for reform, he also observed a lack of principal leadership throughout the system and moved to make changes. At the end of his first year, he replaced a third of the principals in the system. As small schools and high school small learning communities have gained momentum, however, a few principals have shown an interest in working with these new structures. OCO is taking steps to help these principals build the capacity for change at their schools. For example, at Castlemont High School, OCO has brought in a visiting high school principal from Chicago as a resource. This principal, who has had notable success in improving her school in Chicago by turning it from a large urban school into small schools, is working with parents as well as Castlemont's teachers and adminis-

tration. A few elementary school principals have begun to attend OCO public events and the follow-up reflection and evaluation sessions. Principals play an essential part in improving schools, and OCO will need to find strategies for developing principal leadership if small schools are to become vibrant and are to endure.

High Schools

When the Gates Foundation awarded money to Oakland in fall 2000, 60 percent was for work at the high school level. In spring 2001, the Federal Government provided another $1.45 million for the implementation of small learning communities in high schools. This funding directed attention toward the high schools. OCO began systematic organizing at Castlemont High School and in the local community surrounding Castlemont. At the high school, OCO is supporting a team of teachers and administrators in a process of planning for school restructuring. In the community, OCO is working intensely with two congregations and several community groups to help them envision new roles they can play in supporting high school students' learning.

This is new work for OCO; its previous efforts had been focused at the elementary school level. In the country as a whole, urban comprehensive high schools such as Castlemont have been the most resistant to change. Student dropout rates range from 40 to 60 percent, and teachers and administrators are often very demoralized. The challenge of altering these very large and bureaucratic institutions is great, but it is a challenge that school reform cannot afford to avoid. For community organizing groups to have an impact at this level, they will need to adapt their approach to the distinctive parameters of high schools. This will involve: developing a base of knowledge about high schools; finding organizing strategies appropriate to high schools and the families of high school students; and considering a role for students in reform, perhaps through a youth organizing component.

Appendix A
Definitions of the Indicator Areas

Leadership Development builds the knowledge and skills of parents and community members (and sometimes teachers, principals, and students) to create agendas for school improvement. Leadership development is personally empowering, as parents and community members take on public roles. Leaders heighten their civic participation and sharpen their skills in leading meetings, interviewing public officials, representing the community at public events and with the media, and negotiating with those in power.

Community Power means that residents of low-income neighborhoods gain influence to win the resources and policy changes needed to improve their schools and neighborhoods. Community power emerges when groups act strategically and collectively. Powerful community groups build a large base of constituents, form partnerships for legitimacy and expertise, and have the clout to draw the attention of political leaders and the media to their agenda.

Social Capital refers to networks of mutual obligation and trust, both interpersonal and inter-group, that can be activated to leverage resources to address community concerns. Some groups call this "relational" power, while others describe this process as one of building "political capital." Beginning with relationships among neighborhood residents and within local institutions, community organizing groups bring together people who might not otherwise associate with each other, either because of cultural and language barriers (e.g. Latinos, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans) or because of their different roles and positions, such as teachers, school board members, and parents. Creating settings for these "bridging relationships" in which issues are publicly discussed is the key to moving a change agenda forward.

Public Accountability entails a broad acknowledgement of and commitment to solving the problems of public education. It is built on the assumption that public education is a collective responsibility. Community organizing groups work to create public settings for differently positioned school stakeholders—educators, parents, community members, elected and other public officials, the private and nonprofit sectors, and students themselves—to identify problems and develop solutions for improving schools in low- to moderate-income communities. Through this public process, community organizing groups hold officials accountable to respond to the needs of low- to moderate-income communities.

Equity guarantees that all children, regardless of socio-economic status, race, or ethnicity, have the resources and opportunities they need to become strong learners, to achieve in school, and to succeed in the work world. Often, providing equitable opportunities requires more than equalizing the distribution of resources. Community organizing groups push for resource allocation that takes into account poverty and neglect, so that schools in low-income areas receive priority. In addition, groups work to increase the access of students from these schools to strong academic programs.

School/Community Connection requires that schools become institutions that work with parents and the community to educate children. Such institutional change requires that professionals value the skills and knowledge of community members. In this model, parents and local residents serve as resources for schools and schools extend their missions to become community centers offering the educational, social service, and recreational programs local residents need and desire.

High Quality Instruction and Curriculum indicate classroom practices that provide challenging learning opportunities that also reflect the values and goals of parents and the community. Community organizing groups work to create high expectations for all children and to provide professional development for teachers to explore new ideas, which may include drawing on the local community's culture and involving parents as active partners in their children's education.

Positive School Climate is a basic requirement for teaching and learning. It is one in which teachers feel they know their students and families well, and in which there is mutual respect and pride in the school. Community organizing groups often begin their organizing for school improvement by addressing safety in and around the school and the need for improved facilities. Reducing school and class size is another way in which community organizing groups seek to create positive school climates.

Appendix B

Indicators Project National Advisory Group

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Elaine Simon, Ph.D., a Senior Research Associate at Research for Action, is an anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic research and evaluation in the fields of education, employment and training, and community development. She is Co-Director of Urban Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences and adjunct Associate Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Her perspective on education is informed by her background in urban studies and community development. She followed the early 1990s Chicago education reform that devolved power to communities and parents and later the ambitious systemic school reform effort in Philadelphia. Her current research on community organizing for school reform builds on that knowledge and benefits from her broad perspective on urban life and urban school reform.

Chris Brown is the Director of the Schools and Community Program at the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. The Schools and Community Program works with parent and community organizations to increase meaningful parent and community involvement in school reform. He is responsible for providing training and technical assistance to organizations, overseeing research and publication projects, and coordinating cross-site visits. Before coming to Cross City, he served as Community Development Specialist at Chicago's United Way/Crusade of Mercy. Previously, he spent seven years as director of the ACORN Housing Corporation of Illinois, a non-profit group providing home ownership opportunities for low and moderate-income families in Chicago's Englewood community. In addition to his professional work with schools and communities, he also serves as a parent volunteer on the Local School Council of Boone School, the Chicago elementary school his two children attend.

Suzanne Blanc, Ph.D., a Senior Research Associate at Research for Action, is an urban anthropologist who is interested in intersections between the cultural, social, and political contexts of school change. At Research for Action, she focuses primarily on two areas: community engagement in school reform and changing mathematics and science teaching in urban schools. Suzanne received an award for ethnographic evaluation at the December 2001 meeting of the American Association of Anthropology.

Marcine Pickron-Davis, Ph.D., a Research Associate with Research for Action, has worked on a range of projects focused on urban school initiatives that promote community and school partnerships, support teacher professional development, and enhance student achievement. As a human relations educator for the past 10 years, Pickron-Davis has had extensive experience in the design and implementation of leadership training, conflict resolution, anti-racism/anti-bias training, and organizational development. She has conducted trainings and workshops for a wide range of audiences in schools, colleges/universities, corporations, and non-profit organizations. Special areas of interest include multicultural education, student activism, and participatory action research.

Joanna Brown is lead education organizer at Logan Square Neighborhood Association, where she worked in 1993-94 and again from 1997 to the present. She is also a doctoral candidate in anthropology at the University of Chicago, and is writing her dissertation on the experiences of Latina mothers in Chicago public schools. Her masters' thesis documented an experimental bilingual school in the Panamanian indigenous area of Kuna Yala. She has been working in Chicago neighborhoods as a writer and/or organizer since 1980.

Aida A. Nevárez-La Torre, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Education at Temple University and consultant to Research for Action. She is Director of the Professional Development Schools Family Centers and Director of the Bilingual Career Ladder and the Career Advancement for Para-professionals in Education Programs at Temple University. Aida has worked with bilingual teachers documenting their development as teacher/researchers under a Spencer Foundation grant. She also co-edited (with Nitza Hidalgo) a volume for *Education and Urban Society* entitled "Latino Communities: Resources for Educational Change." Her work at Research for Action included a three-year evaluation report (with Eva Gold) of four family literacy initiatives in Philadelphia schools.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform is a national network of school reform leaders from nine cities: Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Seattle. The Cross City Campaign is made up of parents, community members, teachers, principals, central office administrators, researchers, union officials and funders working together for the systemic transformation of urban public schools, in order to improve quality and equity so that all urban youth are well-prepared for post-secondary education, work, and citizenship.

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Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based non-profit organization engaged in education research and reform. Founded in 1992, RFA works with educators, students, parents, and community members to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. RFA's work falls along a continuum of highly participatory research and evaluation to more traditional policy studies.

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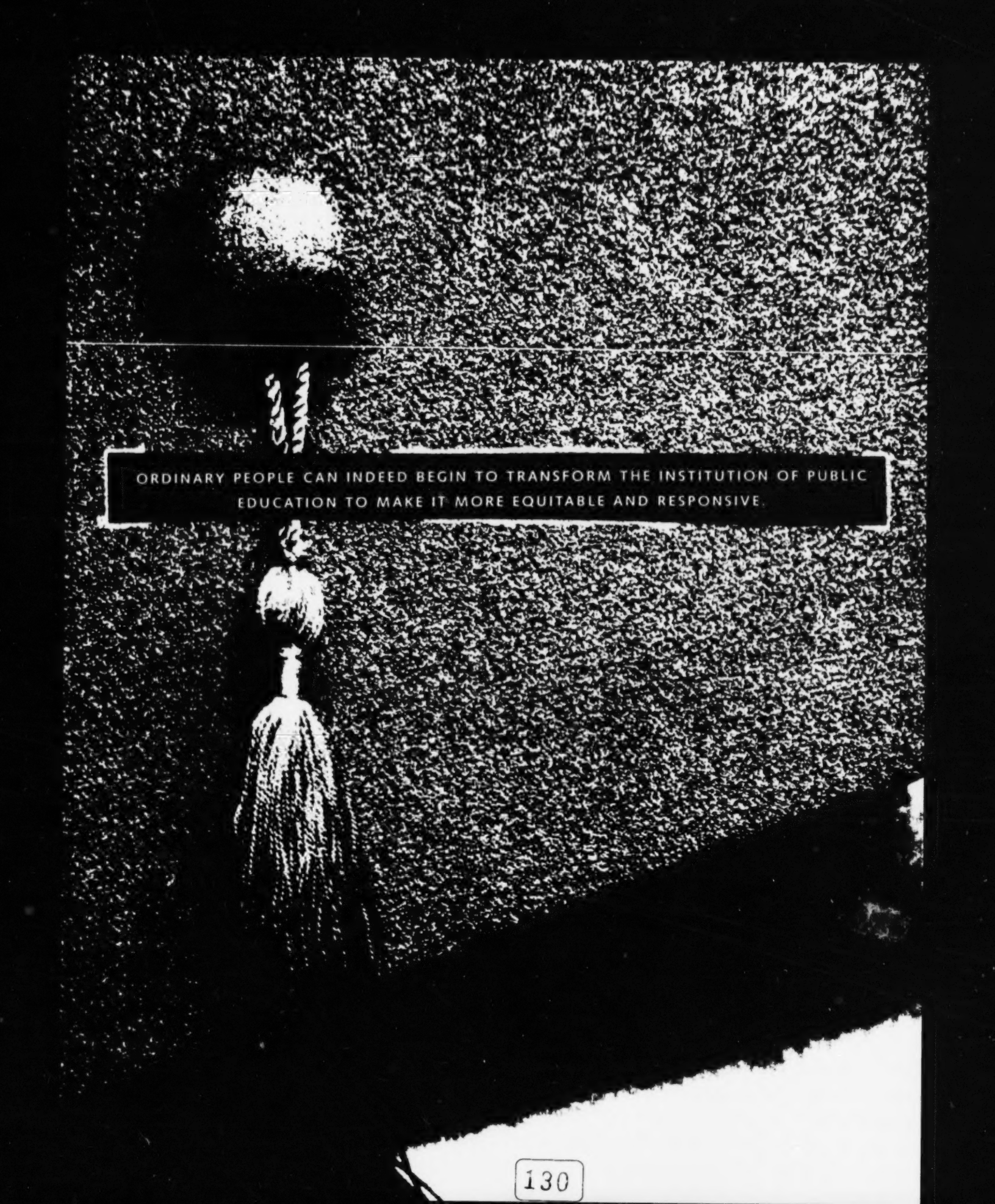
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